WORKERS IN WHITE: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF AN OCCUPATION

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by

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to provide, within a sociological framework, a descriptive analysis of an occupation. The occupation being studied is that of interior-exterior painting and decorating. To accomplish this, the study focuses specifically on a particular work organization. "Workers In White" comprehensively analyzes the major facets of this work group, and attempts to apply the findings to the occupation as a whole and workers in general whenever feasible.

A man's work is a very important, if not the most important activity he engages in during his entire life. Many sociologists believe that an individual's life style and the life chances of his offspring depend to a great extent upon the work which he does. On a larger scale, Miller and Form maintain that by studying work organizations and the technological developments which change the structure of these organizations, one will be better equipped to understand the resultant changes in human ideologies and values. The principles and processes discovered may eventually be utilized to guide and control

this aspect of man's existence.[1]

The building industry and the various trades which comprise it, is one of the largest and most important industries in this country. It is also an area where tremendous technological advancements are rapidly being made. It would seem important to be able to better understand and prepare for the social changes which usually accompany these advancements.

Research in the sociology of work organizations is not a new development. According to Alvin W. Gouldner:

> Both sociology and organizational analysis were early formulated in the work of Henri Saint-Simon. Saint-Simon was probably the first to note the rise of modern organizational patterns, identify some of their distinctive features, and insist upon their prime significance for the emerging society.[2]

In the last few decades a large number of sociological studies have been conducted on occupations ranging from B. R. Stone's "The Gold Miner" to J. H. Fichter's Religion as an Occupation. It is hoped the present research might contribute to the knowledge already accumulated in this area of inquiry.

The method of research employed by the investigator

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[1]D. C. Miller and W. H. Form, Industrial Sociology: The Sociology of Work Organizations (2d ed.; New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 11.

[2]R. K. Merton, Leonard Broom, and L. S. Cottrell, Jr. (eds.), Sociology Today: Problems and Prospects (New York: Basic Books Publishing Co., Inc., 1959), p. 400.

is commonly referred to as participant observation. This research technique employs several methods of analyses prominent in the field of sociology: direct interaction and observation in the field, and formal and informal interviewing. The following chapter will more fully explicate this research design.

The research outline has been borrowed primarily from Robert W. Habenstein's "Categories of Description and Analysis for the Sociological Study of an Occupation."[1] Minor alterations have been made to adapt to the needs of this particular research project.

The subject of this research is a work organization in which the investigator was employed on a part-time basis for a period of twelve years. A complete description of the organization and the community in which it is located is given in Chapter 3. The remainder of this paper then is devoted to a descriptive analysis of this work group.

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[1]Robert W. Habenstein, "Categories of Description and Analysis for the Sociological Study of an Occupation" (University of Missouri, Dittoed MS., n.d.).

Chapter 2

METHOD EMPLOYED

Participant Observation

The cardinal requirement of an empirical science, according to Professor Severyn Bruyn, is to respect the nature of its subject matter. In place of applying to human life an imported scheme of scientific procedure, one must recognize the peculiar character of human beings, their behavior, and their group life.[1] The investigator believes that the method of social research commonly referred to as "participant observation" does in fact recognize the peculiar character of human beings.

At the same time, the concept participant observation brings into focus the position of the researcher who proposes to study human group life. The position which the observer of group life cannot escape is one of contact with and participation in the experiences and actions of those he observes.[2] Toward the accomplishment of this end, "the observer takes on, to some extent at least, the role of a member of the group and participates in its

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[1] Severyn T. Bruyn, The Human Perspective in Sociology: The Methodology of Participant Observation (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. vi.

[2] Ibid.

functioning."[1] The investigator has had the opportunity to assume the role of a participating member in a work organization which is the subject of this research.

From June 1960 until the present, the researcher has been continually employed on a part-time basis by a painting contractor in a suburb of a large Midwestern city. During this twelve year period, first while a student and later as a teacher, the investigator has worked every summer on a full-time basis, on weekends throughout the year and also during Christmas and spring vacations. Not until the spring of 1966 did the thought of using this work group as the subject of a research project arise. From June 1966 to September 1970, this possibility was more one of personal interest and curiosity than official. The observations made during this period and which were prompted only by the investigator's interest have been invaluable in complementing the observations made since September 1970 when serious research began.

This long period of part-time association with the group under study is considered to have been beneficial by the investigator as well as by others. For example, Gideon Sjoberg and Roger Nett maintain:

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[1]Claire Seltiz and Others, Research Methods in Social Relations (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 207.

> . . . there are liabilities to any effort to maximize one's immersion in a system. Aside from the danger of losing one's identity as a scientist, the researcher may become the captive of the group he is studying. His observations may no longer represent his independent judgments or evaluations but may reflect the observer's definition of the situation. For there is more to observation than merely taking the role of the other: The scientist must remain free to make interpretive judgments.[1]

The investigator has found himself in a position within the work group which he feels has been very advantageous for making a comprehensive and complete analysis of this organization. During the twelve year period that he has been a member of this group, there has been the normal phenomenon of turnover in membership which one finds in any organization. There is a core of full-time men who have been with the company for the entire twelve years or longer. There are others who have been with the company less than twelve years, and there are part-time workers who have been with the company anywhere from one to eight years in duration. Finally, as mentioned above, there have been some full and part-time workers who have come and gone. Finding himself more or less in the middle between the core workers and all the other workers, the researcher has found himself in a rather unique position. Since he has been

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[1]Gideon Sjoberg and Roger Nett, A Methodology for Social Research (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 176.

around for so long, the core workers consider him as one of them even though he is a part-timer. On the other hand, the newer workers, both full and part-time, consider him to be one of them, having relatively more seniority with the prestige which usually accompanies it. Under these circumstances, he has on many occasions functioned as a "middleman" and has had the perfect opportunity to ("see both sides of the coin".)

The fact that he has been associated with this organization for twelve years increases the comprehensiveness of this study in yet another way. Although the investigator does not consider himself an expert, he has developed an adequate degree of skill in most of the tasks performed by interior-exterior decorators. He has also had the opportunity to try all of the tasks performed by house painters from scraping peeling paint to spraying lacquer or refinishing woodwork. These and other tasks will be discussed in a later chapter.

The investigator has established and maintained friendly relationships with all of his fellow workers. The type of work involved and the fact that in most instances cooperation is necessary between two or more workers to "get the job done" demands a high degree of interpersonal contact which lends itself to the creation of these friendships.

The rapport established between the author and his fellow workers began on the job and was further enhanced by several nonwork activities. He has gone hunting, fishing, eating and drinking with various members of the group. Often on these occasions the topic of conversation would drift back to the job and information pertinent to the present research could be informally obtained. Formal interviewing was limited to only one member of the work group, and only he alone knew of the investigator's research. Information obtained from this person was in most cases historical and technical in nature--for which the investigator is greatly indebted.

It is the investigator's intention to make a comprehensive and analytically descriptive study of this particular work organization and of the occupation itself as far as it is possible. Toward this end and because of his association with and participation in this particular organization, he feels that the participant observation method of research is the best method available for obtaining the needed data.

Chapter 3

THE OCCUPATION

I. Occupational Scope

The existence and use of paint goes back to the cave drawings of prehistoric man. The early use of paint was for decorative purposes only. Very little is known about paint being used for its protective qualities until the modern era.

Paint began to be manufactured on a small scale in the 18th century. It was first manufactured by a small number of men in the United States and Europe. It is believed that the Industrial Revolution was the major factor behind the manufacturing of paint. The newly introduced machinery that was invented during this period required protection against corrosion. Eventually machines were invented in order to produce large amounts of paint. Paint manufacturing and the painting industry have increased in size ever since. The occupation expanded very rapidly as the building industry developed on a large scale in the early part of the 20th century. It is estimated in The World Book Encyclopedia that in recent years over 630,000,000 gallons of paint and stain have been used in the United States each year.[1]

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[1] "Paint," The World Book Encyclopedia (1919 ed.), XV, 21.

According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook, prepared and published by the United States Department of Labor, there were approximately 460,000 painters employed in 1967.[1] This figure would swell considerably if one were to add the many itinerant painters who seem to be continually drifting from job to job. There is also a substantial number of people who paint on a part-time basis, including the large number of teachers in the United States who during the summer months either paint on their own or for an established painting contractor. As must be evident, many painters are not affiliated with the painters' union.

Put very simply, the work of a painter involves the preparation of surfaces and the subsequent application of paint, lacquer, or similar materials to these surfaces. The purpose of this may be decorative or protective; in most cases it is both. As the above description points out, the job of a painter can be separated into two areas. The first includes all the preparatory measures which must be completed before actual painting can begin. The type and extent of preparatory work needed depends upon the type and condition of the surface to be painted. The second area is concerned with the actual painting of the surface.

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[1]U. S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin No. 1550 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1968-69), p. 350.

The three major tools used to accomplish this task include the brush, spray gun and roller.

Despite the anticipated expansion in the building industry, future job opportunities in this occupation will for the most part arise from the need to replace the painters who transfer to other occupations, retire, or die. This is so because of continued technological developments which work to limit the number of skilled painters needed. These developments include such things as new types of paint which spread and cover easier and allow people with little experience to do their own painting. Many of the newer paints last longer than they formerly did. The advent and increased use of spray painting has reduced the number of painters needed to do certain types of painting. Many materials used in the building industry come pre-finished from the factory. Such materials include siding, windows, kitchen and bathroom cabinets. The increased use of aluminum and plastic building products which do not need a protective coat of paint also work to reduce the number of painters needed.

II. Community Involved

Clipperton (ficticious name) is a rapidly growing suburban community located five miles from a major Midwestern city. The community was incorporated in 1903 and

grew slowly until the early 1940's. At that time an ordinance plant was constructed which employed approximately nineteen thousand employees at peak production. In 1945 the plant was closed down but was reopened two years later by a firm which manufactures heavy farm equipment.

With the end of World War II and the opening of a large manufacturing plant, the population of Clipperton grew at an astonishing rate. The population grew from 1,126 in 1950 to nearly three thousand in only ten years. The decade following 1960 has seen the community grow and expand at an even greater rate. During this ten year period, the population more than tripled until it stood at 9,151 according to the 1970 census. With the tremendous amount of residential building that took place during this period, the community often resembled an old western boom town.

The investigator worked in this suburb for twelve years. Although he did not live in Clipperton, he could sense the pride which the townspeople had for their community. There appeared to be an almost "pioneer" spirit in the air with all the construction and growing that was going on.

Above all, the community is proud of its school system. The reputation of the system is the major reason why young families move to Clipperton. Many young couples

from the large city which borders Clipperton buy homes there because of the school system's reputation. There are over twenty-one hundred elementary students compared to seven hundred junior high and five hundred fifty senior high students. These figures clearly indicate that newcomers to Clipperton are predominantly young married couples.

This description has deliberately stressed the rapid growth of this community. The reason for this is simple. The work organization which is the subject of this paper owes much of its success to this growth. The following section is devoted to describing that work organization.

III. The Company

The painting contractor by whom the investigator was employed, organized the company in 1944. Until 1947 the owner was the only full-time painter. He did employ one or two part-time workers during that three year period. In 1947 a full-time painter was employed. This man is still with the company today.

The company grew in size as Clipperton grew. In 1960 when the investigator began work for this organization, there were five full-time painters employed and a small number of part-timers. Since then, the number of full-time painters has fluctuated between five to eight men. The big increase has been in the number of part-timers

employed. In 1960 only three or four part-timers were employed. In recent years as many as ten to fifteen part-timers may be employed during the summer months. Some are relatively experienced painters, but the majority are delegated to doing preparatory work.

Most of the company's work is done in Clipperton. The contractor estimates that he handles 75 per cent of the painting done in that community. In recent years this adds up to about one hundred ten new units per year and about the same number of repaint jobs. A certain amount of equipment must be maintained in order to handle so much work. The company has three trucks, two electric paint shakers, four spray machines, one paint mixer and approximately forty ladders of various lengths. About nine thousand gallons of paint were used in 1970 and five to six hundred gallons are constantly kept in stock. Last year's labor and materials came to approximately one hundred seventy-five thousand dollars.

The building industry in Clipperton is predominantly non-union. The various unions have tried to recruit locally the last few years but have not met with success. The men in this company are fairly content. The work is steady the year round for full-timers. Wages are competitive with the

surrounding area. Bonuses are given to the full-time employees twice a year. They get two weeks vacation with pay each year, and the company carries medical insurance for the full-time workers and their families.

Chapter 4

NATURE OF THE WORK

I. Task Categories

One might ask a person, "What do you do for a living?" That person might reply, "I work for General Motors." In many cases the first person would then say, "Oh, and what do you do at General Motors?" To this the second person may reply, "I work on the assembly line." If the first person were the very curious type, he would then ask, "What do you do on the assembly line?" If the recipient of these questions had as yet not lost his temper, he might possibly reply, "I'm the fellow that puts the cigarette lighter into the lighter receptacle." Thus, the inquisitive person in the above example finally knows where the person works, the general technical and social level of his work, and indeed, the job or task the person actually performs. To expand on this example, suppose this curious fellow were to ask another man what it was he did for a living and the man replied, "I'm a house painter." This in most cases would end the questioning. However, there is more involved in painting than the average person is aware of. The investigator will attempt

to describe in the following paragraphs the major task categories and specific functions involved in each.

Although the organization painted a vast variety of structures and under many different circumstances, the majority of the painting involved new houses and apartments. For the sake of uniformity, the tasks described will pertain directly to new houses.

In painting a new house, there are three major and distinct operating areas: exterior surface, interior woodwork and interior wall work. Two major task categories are involved in each of these three operating areas. These categories may be referred to as "preparation work" and "finish work". In general, preparation work is considered unskilled work or "flunky work". Finish work requires more skill and is of course reserved for the "painters". Ordinarily the painters must perform tasks in both categories. Only during the summer months is there usually a sufficient supply of part-time workers available to separate the two categories. When this is the case, the painters tend to emphasize the relative level of skill required to perform varying tasks and take great delight in delegating flunky work to the inexperienced or less experienced part-time men.

Exterior

Preparation work here involves simply preparing the surface so that it may be painted. Nail holes in the window and door casings must be puttied. Open joints between pieces of siding must be filled with either putty or calking compound if such open joints exist. If the house has set for any extended period of time, dust and dirt will have collected on the siding and will have to be dusted or washed off. If the concrete men have run true to form, there will be hardened specks of cement which have been splattered on the lower levels of the siding wherever cement work has been done. When this occurs, it must be either scraped off with a wide putty knife or "broad knife," or removed with a wire brush. One last preparatory task then remains. All window and door casings must be "corked" with calking compound in order to fill the crack between the casing and the siding. Unless there is a fairly experienced flunky available, this task will be performed by a painter.

Under ideal conditions, the finish work will be performed by three painters. Two painters will concentrate on "cutting". Cutting involves using paint brushes to paint around windows and doors, where the overhang and siding meet, the rain gutter and down spouts and underneath the lower edge of each piece of siding. In short, the cutters paint everything which cannot be painted with a roller. The third painter will work with a roller and roller pan. His

job is to stay behind the cutters while he rolls all flat surfaces, i.e., the overhang and the siding. This operation is performed twice and upon completion, the painters finish up by brushing the trim, i.e., windows, doors, casings and storm inserts.

Interior wood

In the twelve years that the investigator has been associated with this organization, he has seen more technological change in this phase of the business than in any other. These changes and matters relating to them will be discussed in a later section of this work.

In this area of operation one finds the only example of a relatively stable nuclear work group. Miller and Form describe a nuclear work group as one containing people who interact daily on a face-to-face basis on the job and which is usually composed of work positions that are physically adjacent and functionally interrelated.[1] This group consists of one painter and two to five less experienced workers. Again, this ideal circumstance occurs usually during the summer months. At the first of the summer, two or more part-timers are picked to work exclusively with the sprayer or "trigger man". When part-timers are not available, the unwanted task of working with the trigger man is

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[1]D. C. Miller and W. H. Form, Industrial Sociology: The Sociology of Work Organizations (2d ed.; New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 170.

usually divided among the regulars.

Now to get on with the preparatory. First the woodwork in the house must be "rubbed," i.e., sanded. This accomplishes two purposes; it smoothes the wood and it also removes any stains, mud, gouges or marks which might be present. All hardware such as window locks and doorknobs must be removed. All cabinet, closet and room doors as well as cabinet and closet shelving are removed, marked and stacked in a centrally located room. These items will hereafter be referred to as "slabs". Next an ingenious device called a taping machine is brought into play. On this machine is placed a roll of masking paper, which can vary in width from three to nine inches, and a roll of masking tape. When these items are properly positioned on the machine, one can pull off any length of masking paper he wishes and along one edge of the paper should be masking tape. Approximately half of the tape's width is stuck to the paper leaving the remaining half exposed so that it may be stuck to whatever one wishes to apply it. In the case at hand, the masking paper is used to shield the ceiling of the house from overspray, especially above door and window casings. This overspray occurs when the trigger man directs the spray gun upward in order to spray the tops of casings. Whatever is being sprayed on the wood is thus prevented from discoloring

the ceiling. If the paper shield is not proper and tight, the ceiling is discolored which necessitates the painting of the entire ceiling. Finally, the floors must be swept clean so that dust and dirt particles are not blown onto the woodwork as a result of the force of the spray, especially on the baseboard next to the floor. These functions are usually performed by the flunkies while the trigger man is setting up his equipment and doing any trim work which needs to be brushed.

The final stage, the finishing work has arrived. In the organization under study, lacquer is used to cover the woodwork. Lacquer is a type of varnish which has a very quick drying period. In addition to its quick-drying properties, pigment can be added in order to create a lacquer stain. The first coat applied by the trigger man is lacquer stain. He starts in the far corners of the house and ends up in the room where all the slabs are stacked. Following along behind him are the "wipers". These men carry clean rags and wipe over all the woodwork which the trigger man sprays. This eliminates streaking, running and excessive build up. He then sprays the slabs one at a time on both sides. The wiper takes each slab as it is sprayed into another room where he wipes it, props it up against the wall and then returns for another slab. Because lacquer dries very quickly, the trigger man

can in many cases substitute clear lacquer for the lacquer stain and start right back through the house spraying the first clear finish coat on the wood. The woodwork is then given a light rubbing with a fine grade sandpaper in order to smooth the rough areas. Another coat is sprayed on the wood. The slabs are usually rubbed once again. Nail holes are filled with putty and then the final coat is applied.

Interior walls

As the name suggests, the object here is to paint the walls of a house. The major preparatory task related to interior wall painting is referred to as "taping out" the house. Compared to the preparatory tasks mentioned in connection with the two operating areas discussed earlier, taping out requires a greater amount of skill and time. The more experienced part-time workers perform this task or it is performed by the painters themselves. Using the taping machine with usually three inch wide masking paper, the object is to shield the finished woodwork from sprinkles of paint which normally occur while rolling the walls. The baseboard is completely covered by attaching the tape to the upper lip of the board and then pressing the tape firmly to the baseboard with the use of a putty knife. Strips of paper are usually placed over the tops of window and door casings as well as on window sills. The walls are then checked for cracks or gouges which would need to be filled.

Nail holes must be puttied wherever bare wood is to be painted, such as in closets and cupboards.

As with exterior painting, the ideal number of painters for interior wall work is also three. Again, this three man team group is divided into two cutters and one roller. One cutter works off a four foot step ladder. His function is to cut-in next to the ceiling, across the top of casings, part way down the casings and part way down the corners of the room. The second cutter works from the floor. He cuts in above the baseboard and up the casings and corners. The third worker uses the roller and roller pan. His job is to paint the walls, getting as close to the woodwork as possible without touching it. This same procedure is then repeated, although in some cases if the ladder man has "laid the paint on" heavy enough next to the ceiling, it need not be cut again. With the walls complete, only two jobs remain. The taping paper must be removed and the slabs and appropriate hardware replaced. Both of these tasks can easily be performed by a flunky.

II. Work Routine

From observations made, the investigator has arrived at the conclusion that on the average, painters tend to be rather individualistic in nature. In fact, Richard R. Myers suggests that perhaps more than workers in any other industry,

building workers function as independent units, each worker pursuing employment and making arrangements to apply his skills according to personal contacts, personal preference, and a personal schedule.[1] Myers made this statement based on research conducted on the large-scale, unionized building industry in Detroit. The investigator maintains that this same independence of thought and behavior is also found among building workers in small-scale, non-unionized organizations such as the one under study here. He feels that part of this independent attitude arises from the conditions under which many painters work. The structural requirements of a painter's role tend to become personalized after a period of time and in many cases "colors" his view of the world. To explicate this conclusion, a description of the work routine with emphasis on the lack of structure and supervision follows. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, the ficticious painter in the illustration will be referred to as "Ed".

The work routine begins for Ed when he gets to the shop. He usually gets there a little earlier than necessary for he enjoys talking with the rest of the crew. This is about the only time they are all together. As he drives down the street toward the shop, he can tell who is there

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[1]Sigmund Nosow and William H. Form (eds.), Man, Work, and Society: A Reader in the Sociology of Occupations (New York: Basic Books Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), p. 126.

and who is not by the cars parked along the street in front of the shop. The shop consists of a large room built on the back of the contractor's garage. The room is lined with shelves full of paint and there are dozens of cases of paint stacked here and there around the room. The shop is heated during the winter and is cooled by a window air-conditioner during the summer.

Ed walks through the bosses' garage, through the door in the rear and on into the shop. As usual the boss is working frantically behind a long, large work bench. He is mixing gallon after gallon of paint for different jobs to be done that day. He squirts the varying amounts of coloring he needs into each gallon, pounds the lids on, puts them on the electric shaking machines, flicks on the switch and then starts over again. The boss looks up as Ed walks in but does not acknowledge him; he just keeps working. This "bugs" Ed sometimes but he realizes it is not because the boss is not friendly, that is just the way he is. Upon mentioning this once, the investigator was told by one of the regulars, "Hell, you could walk in here and steal every damn gallon of paint he's got and he wouldn't know it until he got done mixin'."

Immediately Ed is greeted by his fellow workers. They are all sitting around on gallons of paint, more or less in the shape of a circle. Ed grabs two gallons of paint, puts them side by side and takes a seat. The

worker next to him comments, "Boy, he's wild today," in reference to the boss. As usual the topic of conversation centers around the drinking exploits of one or more of the men the night before. One of the men involved in the previous night's activities is quietly sitting with his head cradled in his hands. A college student; one of the part-time workers enters. Immediately the regulars begin to tease the student by making off-color remarks about his long hair and/or beard. The boss will many times join in this type of activity since he does not approve of his workers having either long hair or beards. Ed remembers back to various occasions when the boss actually paid the price of a haircut and shave for some of these part-timers.

It is getting close to starting time; the men begin to talk about who is going where. It is very seldom Ed knows in advance what he will be doing and with whom he will be working. The boss begins to call off groups of names. These people will be working together, at least for a while. But one of the workers has not shown up. This usually causes mass confusion which most of the workers seem to enjoy as it postpones leaving the shop. The boss must now rearrange men and groups in order to replace the delinquent man. Strangely enough, the missing person was not involved in the previous evening's activities. At least if he was, the others are not letting on

in front of the boss.

Ed finally gets his assignment. He is to work with one other regular, an experienced part-timer and an inexperienced part-timer. He sets about helping to collect all of the equipment and paint they will need to complete the job. Their orders include where to go and what to do in the event they finish early. Three are to go to another job together; the inexperienced flunky is to go on home unless things change during the day.

Upon arriving at the job in their separate cars, they proceed to unload the equipment and take it into the house. Their assignment is to paint the interior walls. The flunky is to help with the preparatory work and then go to the new house across the street and start preparing it for painting. They all set about their work. One of the regulars gives instructions to the flunky. Ed turns on his transistor radio. A radio is almost a part of each man's equipment; many carry one, especially the younger workers. Ed turns his on first because he realizes that one of the fellows he is working with likes to listen to country western music and Ed does not care to listen to that all day. The task each man does is determined on the job, usually by consensus. These men have worked together many times and each knows who can do what best or at least who "likes" to do what best.

Sometimes, especially during the winter, the men will have a quick coffee break immediately after getting to the job. They almost always take a break mid-way through the morning. Sometimes a flunky might be sent to the store for donuts if a store is close. In any event, the men congregate in the living room, sit on the floor with their backs against the wall and take their break. The topic of conversation is the job--what to do next? How long will the job take? If they finish early, what should they do? Go to the other job or go have a beer? The break lasts approximately fifteen minutes. It may run longer if the conversation is lively. Usually someone takes the lead and stands up; this signifies the break is over. Of course, the man is usually jokingly accused of "being a damn company man".

A few minutes before noon, the men wash up for lunch. Most of the workers in the company do not live in the community where the shop is located. Of the three workers with whom Ed is working, only one is a "local". He goes home for lunch while Ed and the other two workers go where they go everyday they work in town. The combination tavern and cafe is affectionately called their "Union Hall". The Union Hall is actually what is referred to as a "working man's" bar which also sells soup and sandwiches.

Ed and the others go here for two reasons: first, they will usually see other members of the crew if they are working in town; and secondly, this is the only place in town where they can have a couple of beers plus get something to eat. Ed sees that no other crew members are present so the three of them find stools and sit at the bar. Ed does not especially feel like having a beer today but the others have ordered a beer and he knows that he will be the brunt of jokes throughout lunch if he does not order one also, so he follows suit. The color TV behind the bar is turned on to the usual channel. There are fifteen minutes of news followed by fifteen minutes of cartoons.

Men continue to pour into the tavern in groups until it is nearly full. Ed knows most of the guys, if not by name then by sight at least. A few slap him on the back as they walk by and he acknowledges them. A couple stop to ask him where one or two other crew members are. Ed replies that he does not know, that they might be working out of town. The bar maid brings the food and says to Ed, "You should have been here with your buddies last night. They really had a time." Ed smiles to her and thinks to himself that he hates to miss a good time but he saw them this morning and he is glad he does not feel as bad as they looked.

By now the tavern is full of carpenters, plumbers,

electricians, cement men, dry-wall men, brick layers, etc. Few men at the bar watched the news but now the cartoons are on and most of the men sit with their eyes glued on the screen while they eat their food. The investigator has always been amazed at this behavior even though he is aware of the fact that many studies have been conducted in the field of social stratification which point out differing characteristics pertaining to the social classes. One of these differences in life styles is the type of literature and entertainment characteristic of varying social classes. Still, the sight of grown men sitting in a tavern drinking beer and watching cartoons remains an interesting phenomenon to him. Lunch time is over and Ed prepares to pay for his meal and return to the job. How careful Ed is to get back on time depends mainly on whom he happens to be working with. Today he knows he should be on time.

Back on the job the men continue with their work. After completing a room and washing his equipment, Ed might light up a cigarette and relax for a few minutes before "getting into another color". Again, how often he does this depends on whom he is working with. As the day wears on, Ed begins to work a little harder. He does not mind leaving a job unfinished; it happens all the time and there is always tomorrow. But he knows the boss does not like

the men to clean up and quit for the day when a matter of fifteen or thirty minutes more work would have finished the job. Besides, the topic of conversation turns to the Union Hall. Ed and one of the workers he is with decide to go up for a beer after work. Quitting time is near and the job is done. Nothing left now but pulling papers and putting on hardware which a part-timer will do tomorrow. Ed and the others clean up their equipment, fill out their time slips, check to make sure all the windows are closed and lock the doors.

While driving up to the Union Hall, Ed reflects on the day's work. It has been a fairly pleasant day. It is not very often the boss leaves you on one job all day. It seems he is always coming around, usually during the coffee break when everyone is sitting down, and changing your assignment or that of someone else. Switching jobs in the mid-morning or early afternoon is not so bad, but changing jobs with an hour or two left in the day bothers all the men on the crew. The only time you do not mind it is when you have been working by yourself or doing something you do not care to do. Ed gets closer to the Union Hall and begins looking for a place to park. The tavern is always full of factory workers and building workers at this time of day. Ed walks in and spots five fellow crew men in the large booth in the corner. As he pulls a chair up, one of

his buddies yells to the bartender, "Hey, bring Ed a beer and bring two bags of popcorn." The first phase of the conversation is always the same--"Who worked where and with whom? The boss did this, the foreman did that, etc." All of the complaints, gossip and threats come out first. Meanwhile, another round of beer is ordered. Ed pays for his own so that he will not feel guilty about leaving before he buys a round. He checks his watch, drinks down his beer and announces that he has to go. Immediately the others start in on him, someone quickly orders another round; Ed lets himself be pulled back down in his chair and agrees to have "one more". It is not very often anyone leaves on the first try. After this beer, two others besides Ed decide to leave. The three others remain to have just one more. Ed gets to his car and starts home while he thinks to himself, "Maybe they will only have one more and maybe they won't. In either case, I'll hear about it tomorrow morning."

The above description is that of a normal day in the life of a painter in the work organization under study. This same routine is repeated many times over each day in all walks of life. The investigator surely does not maintain that this is characteristic of painters alone. It is however characteristic of many. In the material which follows, he will attempt to further explore, expand and

describe the formal, informal and personal facets of this occupation.

III. Demands of the Work

As is the case in all occupations, a certain amount of education and training is necessary before one can perform adequately in a work position. When one progresses to where he is actually fulfilling the expectations of a work position, he is then playing his work role. Miller and Form discuss what is involved in a work position in the following manner:

> Irrespective of the occupant, the work position has three major aspects: (1) the technical operations of the job; (2) the physical locations of the worker on the job and all of the physical objects which compose and surround a given work position; (3) the social demands which must be fulfilled by anyone who is to perform adequately in the position. These demands include (a) the circumscribed round of activities, or the sequence of activities, demanded of the job; (b) the number and nature of the worker's contacts with other people or objects while on the job; and (c) the way in which the worker's activities fit into those of other workers and are viewed by other workers in their jobs.[1]

The investigator will deal rather briefly with the technical aspects of painting. Many of the tasks a painter must be qualified to perform were discussed earlier under the heading Task Categories. One must only pick up a

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[1] D. C. Miller and W. H. Form, Industrial Sociology: The Sociology of Work Organizations (2d ed.; New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1964), pp. 169-70.

manual describing the apprenticeship program in the painting and decorating industry to find a long list of specific technical tasks a painter should be able to perform. This becomes a matter of training. Being able to perform the physical tasks is only half of it though. One who has progressed this far has acquired a certain amount of skill, but can only be called an "applicator," not a painter. While developing the skills one needs, he must also learn about the materials he uses, i.e., What to use? When to use it? How to mix? Why mix? When to mix? What colors make what color, and many other questions. With this differentiation in mind, the investigator has observed that most painters are applicators but few applicators are painters.

Painting requires a certain amount of strength and stamina. Most of the time a painter works while on his feet, either on the ground or from the top of a ladder. The arms and shoulders do the greatest share of the work. Certain tasks call for an immense amount of bending at the waist while others require one to face upward throughout much of the day. The infrequent performance of tasks which require these specific activities causes a certain amount of soreness the same as an office worker might experience if he exercised only once a week.

The use of ladders has already been mentioned. Naturally one must not suffer vertigo or be acrophobic. Climate is also a factor which must be considered. Most construction in the building industry takes place during the warmer months of the year. Naturally this is the busiest time of the year for most painters. One must be able to function when the temperature and perhaps the humidity is very high. Working on a ladder and/or working in extremely warm weather tends to physically drain the average person and painters are no different. There are certain specific tasks which take more out of a painter than is normal. Steaming wall paper and water proofing basements are two examples of such tasks.

Concerning the social demands of work positions, the investigator again turns to Miller and Form. They maintain that a contradiction inherent in business thinking is the conflict between teamwork and individualism. Cooperation is essential if the team is to successfully reach its goal. Opposing this view is the ideal that every worker should be personally ambitious to make a good record since rewards are usually distributed according to individual achievements. In the end a worker's success depends upon his ability to outperform his fellow workers.[1] It has been

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[1]Miller and Form, op. cit., p. 148.

previously stated that painting requires a certain amount of cooperation, but at the same time painters tend to be rather individualistic in nature. The investigator has been able to observe the existence of both these qualities.

Among the long-time regulars in the work group, cooperation prevails, at least on the surface. The dividing up of tasks between the workers once they reach the job is done openly and fairly. The men are generally quick to help one another as the need arises. This can be attributed to the fact that these men have worked together for a number of years. They do not exhibit as much competitive behavior as one finds in larger scale operations where there are constant changes in the labor force from job to job. The individualistic, competitive spirit is always present however even though it is somewhat held in check. Each worker is aware of the output of those with whom he is working. No matter what tasks are being performed, how much and how well one does in relation to others is a matter of concern. If the investigator has heard once, he has heard hundreds of times, comments such as, "Boy, look at him move. He's gonna have that done before I get started"; and "I ain't fast, but I sure do nice work." A common topic of conversation among the men many times centers around the relative abilities of each man in different areas of work.

Personal adaptability is also an important facet of any occupation in which men are thrown together at irregular intervals and expected to work as a team. Again, in the organization under study, the regulars have been together long enough to where this creates few problems. Over a span of twelve years however, many workers have come and gone. Some could adapt to the organization: most could not. According to Richard R. Myers, in each case when a newcomer joins the organization, situations arise in which strangers must work together. Although similar functions are to be performed, adjustments must be made in terms of work pace, motion and personal idiosyncrasies, because the work is essentially cooperative work, with individual operations overlapping and complementing one another. Each social group has norms to which the newcomer must adapt if he is to successfully fulfill his work role.[1] The investigator observed that newcomers to the organization who were experienced painters were very likely to display the strong competitive and individualistic behavior previously attributed to building workers. In most instances, this behavior and attitude on the part of newcomers served to keep them on the move. Not being able to adjust, they either drifted on or were let go. The itinerant will be discussed further

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[1]Nosow and Form, op. cit., p. 131.

in a future section of this paper.

Finally, whenever workers and customers meet, a new dimension is added to the social aspect of the work position. Painters are frequently approached on the job by the main building contractor who usually wants things done his way and wants them done now. They are also confronted by prospective buyers or by the new owners themselves who may want this or that color changed. Perhaps the most delicate situation for the painter to handle is when he is working in a house in which a family is living. Whenever such situations arise, painters must be able to perform adequately.

IV. Changing Techniques

Technological advances have affected all phases of the world of work. Miller and Form have the following to say about changes in technology, especially as related to labor unions and the building industry:

> The rise of labor unions is often attributed to the unsettling effects of technological and organizational changes. Unions are fighting some industrial changes directly, attempting to soften the effects of others, and encouraging those which increase the security of the workers.
>
> In such industries as building construction, which are by nature dynamic and unsettling, particularly strong unions have arisen. They have sought to minimize the effects of insecurity by

> controlling the recruitment of workers, setting the pace of work, resisting technological improvements, and establishing benefit funds.[1]

Union or non-union, technical changes continue to take place and the painting industry is no exception. For all practical purposes, the days when a brush and bucket were the most important pieces of equipment a painter needed are gone. During the past twelve years, many changes have taken place. The investigator has observed these changes and their effect on the workers. Naturally these advances had occurred elsewhere earlier, but for the men in this particular organization, they were new. It is the researcher's intention here to briefly describe the major changes which took place during this period of time.

As earlier stated, the area of operation in which the most dramatic change has taken place is in the finishing of woodwork. When the investigator was first employed, all woodwork was done by hand; that is, with a brush. The wood was stained, sanded, varnished, sanded, varnished, puttied, sanded and varnished again. The method and material used made this a long process, lasting for several days. This area of work required much skill and is one in which painters normally took great pride in the finished product.

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[1]Miller and Form, op. cit., pp. 102-03.

Then came the spray machine. No other change which has occurred since, at least from the author's observations, caused such anxiety and bitterness among the workers. Here was a major skill which was being discarded for the sake of speed. The job now required less men and about half the time it previously had. What the workers feared most was running out of work. This of course never occurred. Nonetheless, it took a number of years before the transition from brush to spray became complete and before the men accepted it. Today, although the spray man receives higher pay and commands a certain amount of respect from the painters, the woodwork phase of painting has suffered greatly in prestige. The situation worsened with the change from varnish to lacquer. Because of lacquer's quick-drying properties, the normal three bedroom ranch house can be completed in one day. It has been a number of years since these changes have taken place, but still the "old timers" take pride in explaining in great detail to the younger men exactly how "we used to do it".

Subsequent changes in techniques were somewhat smaller in scope and were more easily accepted by the workers. Some anxiety and opposition was nonetheless present, for according to Robert K. Merton:

> . . . Workers, like executives, seek some measure of control over their day-by-day lives.

> Changes imposed upon them without their prior knowledge and consent are regarded as a threat to their well-being. . . .[1]

The author maintains that workers continued to feel insecure and threatened even when they had prior knowledge of a change which was to be implemented.

Perhaps the next most traumatic change which took place involved the switch from brush to roller for exterior work. Again, this cut down on the number of painters and time needed to paint a house. Instead of three men brushing the siding with from four to six inch wide brushes, two of them could perform the necessary cutting with three inch brushes while the third man ran the roller. Under ideal conditions, a normal sized ranch house can now be painted in one day. Consequently, the men again feared the possibility of running out of work.

Various other changes have taken place but they are minor changes compared with those mentioned above. All changes, however minor or major, did elicit opposition from various members of the organization. This opposition was not always from the same worker or workers. The homeguard and itinerant painters usually had a role to play in this area. Both will be discussed in later sections.

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[1]Nosow and Form, op. cit., p. 83.

Chapter 5

FORMAL OPERATIONS

Whenever people group together in order to obtain a specific goal, some sort of organizational structure is formed. If only two people are involved, one usually is led by the other. As the size of the group grows, so the structure of its organization also grows and becomes more differentiated until it may become a full-fledged bureaucracy. When studying formal organizations, William F. Whyte maintains that two elements must be considered: (1) the officially determined structure of positions in the organization, with the officially established channels of who-reports-to-whom, and (2) the activities officially assigned to each position.[1] The work organization being observed can best be examined along these lines.

I. Formal Authority

In reality, the title of this section could be Informal Official Authority as that more accurately describes the organizational structure. The company is characterized by informality. But in order to coordinate

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[1]William F. Whyte, Men at Work (Homewoods, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, Inc., and Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1961), p. 8.

the activities of the workers so as to get the work done, there has to be a superior position, a position wherein lies the ultimate power. This is what Miller and Form refer to as the "line organization". They maintain that in theory, ". . . there is a direct line from the man at the top of the hierarchy to the worker who actually makes the product or provides the service."[1]

At the top of the organization under observation is the paint contractor. He is the owner and the men refer to him as "the boss". Although ultimate power rests with him, there are few formal controls. The men know what he expects of them as far as staying on the job and getting the work done is concerned. In this particular organization the vertical line of authority is relatively short. For the most part commands move directly from the boss to the workers. During the slower part of the year, from late fall through early spring when the size of the work crew is smallest, the boss can supervise the men with relative ease. Many times he will work right along with the men. Under these conditions the distance between the men and the boss is small and he is aware of what is happening on the job.

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[1]D. C. Miller and W. H. Form, Industrial Sociology: The Sociology of Work Organizations (2d ed.; New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1964), pp. 125-6.

From late spring through early fall the size of the crew may double or triple. Many different jobs are being worked on any particular day. Many times in order to satisfy an impatient building contractor, a job will be started and then left idle for a few days until it can be taken care of. This time of year is very hectic; every job seems to be a "rush job". The investigator has personally been assigned to as many as nine totally different and separate jobs during the course of one day. This of course would be somewhat unusual, but for the men to work on from two to four separate jobs a day is not uncommon at all. To add to the confusion, some of these jobs may be out of town. The reader can appreciate the difficulties which one man would have trying to coordinate the activities of from twelve to twenty men, many times split into three man team groups. To clarify and emphasize the position which the boss finds himself in, a hypothetical example will be given. Suppose there are fifteen workers split into five teams of three men each. Each team on the average is assigned three separate jobs which totals fifteen in all. How long each job will take can only be estimated. No one can foresee complications which may occur on any of the fifteen jobs. The boss may have to pull a team off one job and put it on another in order to please a restless contractor. Many other things could occur which would

necessitate changes being made in job assignments. In fact, it is normal for these disruptions to occur.

As should be evident, a second level of command is needed in order to better coordinate the activities of the workers in accordance with the objectives of the contractor. This function in the building industry is usually performed by a foreman. It is at this point where a breakdown in the formal line of authority occurs in this organization. There is no "officially" designated foreman, but there is an "unofficial" foreman. It is because of this that the investigator has chosen to use William Whyte's description of a formal organization as cited earlier and must agree with his reasoning which follows:

> If we were to go out in the field to observe behavior and then categorize our observations under formal and informal organization, we would quickly get into insoluble problems. At the extremes, it may seem easy enough to distinguish between formal and informal behavior, but we actually find a large part of the behavior we observe falling between these extremes, where we can make no clear-cut distinctions.
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> For purposes of this book, the key word in our definition of formal organization structure is "officially". We are dealing with positions officially established and activities officially assigned to each position.[1]

The situation which exists is uncommon but not at all unique. The unofficial foreman in this organization

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[1]Whyte, op. cit., p. 82.

is the son of the contractor. He has grown up in the business and has painted on a regular basis for over fifteen years. He is experienced and skilled in every facet of painting and has on various occasions run the company during his father's absence. But in the eyes of the workers he is not officially the foreman with the prestige and authority which a foreman usually has. The investigator has heard various workers exclaim, "Hell, he ain't my boss. The old man is the boss. He may be the bosses' son but he isn't my boss." In the opinion of the observer, this situation is the result of two simple factors: (1) the boss has never publicly and officially proclaimed him foreman before the men, and (2) he does not portray the image or successfully play the role of a foreman. He works with the men. He occasionally drinks with the men. In effect, he is many times seen as "one of the boys". The investigator could quote many comments which help exemplify this point, but just a few worker comments should suffice: "If he's supposed to be a foreman and boss me around, then he'd better act like a foreman." "He should wear a clean shirt and dress slacks, maybe even have 'foreman' written on his shirt pocket." "Damnit, if he's supposed to be the foreman, then the ole man should let him act like one. Let him do nothing but drive around from job to job checking up like a foreman's supposed to." Hopefully the reader can

better understand the type of situation which exists, and in some instances the bitterness which it creates. The workers usually obey orders which he gives but they do so because he is the bosses' son, not because he is their boss.

Formal authority ends here. Any authority which exists on a lower level is purely unofficial and will be discussed in a later section of this paper.

II. Recruitment

As members of a work organization die, retire or leave the organization voluntarily or involuntarily, there must be means available by which these members can be replaced if the organization is to survive. Indeed, recruitment of new members must be possible if the organization is going to grow. Methods of recruitment naturally vary from occupation to occupation. This section describes how this very important operation is accomplished in this particular organization. The methods themselves are not new nor unique to this industry, but rather they are more characteristic to the building industry than to other occupational fields.

As was previously stated, building workers tend to function as independent units, selling and applying their

skills according to personal preference when possible. Due to this and the dynamic nature of the industry, especially on a larger scale where employment may be on a job-to-job basis, a high worker turnover is a distinct characteristic. Although the company under observation has operated for a number of years with a very stable core of workers, there have been many "itinerants" who have come and gone. The investigator has been able not only to observe, but also to play a part in the recruitment processes.

Student Trainees

These workers have played a very crucial part in the operation of this organization. Since the busiest time of the year is during the summer, naturally the size of the work crew must be substantially increased during this period or work would be turned down. Much of the manpower needed is provided by student trainees. They function as flunkies and perform much of the preparatory work leaving the finish work for the more experienced employees.

These workers are initially employed while in high school and occasionally while in college. Some of these trainees are children of the contractor's friends. Others are school mates of these trainees. Occasionally while working in an occupied home where a high school aged boy lives, the contractor will pay him for doing some of the

flunky work. When the job is over, the boy may be hired for summer work. These workers usually return summer after summer until their college education is finished. A few of these workers have been working on a part-time basis for over fifteen years. Naturally the longer they work the more skilled they become. Eventually they become what the investigator has already termed "experienced part-timers". Meanwhile, new student trainees are constantly being employed as they are needed. Unlike union apprentices, seldom do these student trainees begin to work full-time upon graduation from high school. Only once in the last twelve years has this occurred, and that particular worker is still planning on returning to college.

Experienced Workers

The need for more experienced painters arises from time to time. Like most contractors that have been in the business for a number of years, he has a list of painters who have helped him out in the past which he can resort to. It would not be unusual for him to drop by the worker's house in order to entice him to come to work. Many times the length of employment is short, perhaps only until a particular rush job is completed.

If the job is average in nature, out of town, and the emergency is great enough, the entire job may be sub-contracted to another crew. Many times the boss of this

other crew is a former employee who decided to make it on his own. They can normally use the work and are very willing to accept it unless there are some hard feelings between the two. In this case and the previous one, the boss may attempt to keep the employment of these temporary workers a secret. If they were hired to complete a rush job, they are often paid top dollar. The regular workers usually resent their employment and especially so if they are being paid more. Consequently, these temporary workers are usually hired for out of town work and do not come to the shop each morning like the regulars.

Itinerants

Although these workers will be discussed in a later section devoted to them alone, the various means by which these men are hired might be noted here. Occasionally it is necessary for the contractor to advertise in the paper. To the investigator's knowledge, this has happened very few times in the last twelve years. A more common method is by reputation. A painter hears about a certain contractor through other painters, calls him on the telephone or stops by his house to discuss employment.

Another method which happens less frequently but is still fairly common occurs when a painter hits town, asks a few questions, is given the contractor's name by someone and then drops by the shop in the morning. This

same person may just happen to be driving by a job where painters are working, stop and ask for the boss in order to obtain employment. Finally, some of the regulars may be in a tavern after work and be approached by a stranger who is interested in finding work. When this happens, if the regulars do not particularly take to the stranger, they will claim the boss is not hiring. On the other hand, if they have a few beers together and hit it off, they may even put in a good word to the boss the next day.

These are the most common methods of recruitment. The investigator has observed or played a part in most of them. The same basic patterns of recruitment naturally occur in other occupations, but the informality and frequency of occurrence seems characteristic of this one.

III. Evaluation of Merit

The intrinsic satisfaction some people receive from the work they perform is not unimportant, but money seems to be a very important personal value in American society. The vast majority of American workers expect monetary compensation for their labors. Many receive little or no satisfaction from their work other than the money they receive. Miller and Form discuss two theories of rewarding workers. The first is the functional theory in which one is paid according to his economic function, his efforts,

skills and economic risks. The status theory of payment rewards a person according to his social status, the status of his family and his social obligation to relatives, employees and others.[1]

In the organization being studied, the method of rewarding workers is very accurately described by Miller and Form in the following way:

> . . . a few concessions to the functional income theory have survived in American society. Normally a more seasoned employee is paid a higher wage rate than a less seasoned worker even if both do the same job at the same performance level. Women and children have been traditionally paid lower salaries than men. Seniority has been recognized by giving long-tenure workers priority in promotions. Men, old workers and the most experienced are usually last to be released during production cutbacks even though they may not be the most productive employees. The norms underlying these exceptions are that the employer should recognize the greater responsibilities which older and married men usually have. In addition, older employees are thought to be more loyal to the company and, in the long run, more productive.[2]

Only two exceptions to this description should be noted. The spray man generally commands a higher wage, at least for the time which he actually is spraying. This is true regardless of age, seniority, responsibilities or experience in other areas of painting. Secondly, the

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[1]Miller and Form, op. cit., p. 436.

[2]Ibid., p. 438.

investigator has observed that during slow periods when workers must be laid off, seniority is the prime factor determining who is laid off.

In a situation such as this, the possibility of income inequities can arise. Employees, especially in a small organization, are usually aware of what their fellow workers are paid. If such a situation exists, tensions can arise which may affect the operation of the organization. Although not severe, such a situation did exist in this particular work organization. To understand its origin, the reader must be aware of the different methods used for evaluating relative merit of the workers. As has been explained, the owner placed more emphasis on seniority. Skill became the criteria in cases where a new painter was hired, one with previous experience. The new man however was seldom paid a wage equivalent to that received by the senior worker on the crew.

In the eyes of the workers, one's merit was based on a combination of three factors: skill, speed, and seniority. Skill seems to have dropped some in importance in the last few years since the company has grown so rapidly. Naturally speed has increased in importance since the volume of work has substantially increased. Contrary to the usual practice of not paying a part-time worker as

much as a regular, most of the men felt that an experienced and skilled man should be paid accordingly, regardless of his membership basis. Dissatisfaction among the experienced part-timers was evident. Comments such as the following were heard many times: "So what if he only works in the summer? He does better work and gets more done in three months than so-and-so does in a year;" or "Who gives a damn if he's part-time, he should get paid what he's worth." As could be expected, part-timers placed more emphasis on skill and speed. Most of the regulars felt the same way but would tend to place some emphasis on seniority as well. Seniority was especially important to the regulars whenever an experienced painter was hired and given a wage which approximated their own. The same was true of the unskilled flunkies. Concerning wages and whatever criterion one uses to establish them, it appeared that the workers would rather be superior to some and inferior to others than equal to all.

Chapter 6

INFORMAL OPERATIONS

Having devoted the previous chapter to the formal operations of the organization under observation, this chapter will deal exclusively with the informal or unofficial operations as they were observed. William F. Whyte gives Elton Mayo and his research group credit for articulating the concept of "informal organization" to point to the tendency of workers in an organization to develop relationships which are not part of the formal organizational structure. He maintains that a student must study the informal as well as the formal organization in order to receive a complete and accurate picture of organizational behavior.[1] For a more precise definition of "informal organization," the investigator borrows the following description from the works of Delbert C. Miller and William H. Form:

> Informal organization consists of a number of things. It is composed of the animosities and friendships among the people who work together. It contains the primary groups, cliques, and congeniality groups that develop in shop or office. It further consists of the folkways, mores, norms, and values which guide the behavior of workers, sometimes in the fulfillment of the goals of formal organization and sometimes in the blockage

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[1]William F. Whyte, Men at Work (Homewoods, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, Inc., and Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1961), p. 10.

> of those goals. Informal organization is a source of much social control. In it a prestige and power structure evolves which may be at variance with similar structures in the formal organization. In fact, the relation of the informal organization to the formal organization determines how effectively the latter will function.[1]

The material which follows about informal or unofficial organizational behavior is based upon the investigator's observations while participating in this behavior.

I. Informal Division of Labor

Whenever men are grouped together and instructed to complete a specific job, there must be some division of labor instituted so that the individual tasks involved can be efficiently handled. The formally defined "S.O.P." usually lays out the order in which tasks must be accomplished in order to best complete the job. Unless tasks are officially assigned to each worker in the group, the group as a whole must decide "who will do what". The decisions made by the group constitute the informal division of labor.

In most cases the groups that are assembled daily by the contractor could be referred to as "team groups". They are teams insofar as the members work together

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[1]D. C. Miller and W. H. Form, Industrial Sociology: The Sociology of Work Organizations (2d ed.; New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 119.

toward a common objective. Unlike a team in the sports field, each player does not have an assigned task to complete. The men are left free to informally decide the distribution of tasks.[1]

In cases when the boss assigns specific tasks to individuals, the men may "switch" assignments once they are on the job. In most cases however, the boss does not assign workers specific tasks. As is the difference between sacred and secular, the men so accept the difference between preparatory and finish work. This is the only division of labor which approaches formalization. Naturally, the painters perform the finish work, that which requires more skill.

Once the job is reached, for the sake of efficiency, an informal leader appears. In the majority of cases it is the senior member of the group. In other cases a leader may arise because of the person's leadership abilities. Whichever the case, neither discussion nor voting is necessary. Invariably upon reaching the job, one of the men will direct a comment to a fellow worker such as the one that follows, "Well Ed, what do you want me to start on?"

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[1]B. R. Stone, "The Gold Miner: A Study in the Sociology of an Occupation" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1962), p. 39.

This immediately signifies to the entire team who is to lead. He does not begin to issue orders, but rather to offer suggestions in which he leaves the choice up to his fellow workers. If one task is more unpleasant than the others, it usually becomes a voluntary matter. The men are aware in most cases which worker can best perform each task and the allocation of tasks usually follows such a pattern.

During off periods when inexperienced workers are not available to perform the more tedious preparatory tasks, they are handled in either of two ways. All of the men may tackle the task, thus splitting up the work and getting it out of the way quickly. In certain situations when this is not possible, the task usually falls to the man with the least experience. If the same situation arises again, other workers will usually volunteer for the task.

As it quite often occurs whenever the boss has time to do some painting himself, he takes one or two of the men with him. In many cases the men do not end up working as hard as they would if not with the boss, and in most cases the conversation is as lively as it would be with the other men. Still, none of the men actually look forward or want to work with the boss. Part of this is

attributable to the uneasiness many feel when working in the presence of a superior. It is the investigator's personal opinion however, that the major reason for this is the lack of the informal division of labor. Instead of being able to accept a task voluntarily, one is naturally "told" what to do. People tend to accept things more readily when they believe it was their choice.

II. Cliques

This particular area of the research project has been a rather difficult one for the investigator. The fact that informal groupings and relationships develop whenever men are brought together in a work situation is a ubiquitous phenomenon and is generally accepted. These most often occur as a result of face to face relationships over an extended period of time. This situation does not usually exist in the organization under study. The team groups which are formed each day usually last for that day only and in many cases do not even last the whole day. A painter in this organization may work with two other men on Monday and then not work with them again as a group for the remainder of the week. Yet, the investigator has observed that voluntary group life does exist among some of the men.

Exceptions do occur in that occasionally two or three men will find themselves working together over a

period of weeks or perhaps even months. This may occur when one man is assigned to work with the trigger man. This allows the man to learn the sprayer's routine and leads to a quicker and more efficient operation. This face to face relationship creates the base upon which a voluntary group can form but does not insure its happening. Other ties must develop as Robert Dubin explains in the following paragraph:

> The pair relationship involves identity of personality, ideas, feelings, and emotions of the members. They appear to an observer as sharing a number of common characteristics. The members of the pair tend to behave and act alike.[1]

Three men may find themselves working together over an extended period of time also. This has happened numerous times but only once has the investigator observed the formation of a social group. Robert Dubin refers to this as a triad and maintains that it differs from the pair in the following manner:

> . . . in the pair there is a high degree of intimate associations and sharing of feelings, ideas, attitudes, and reactions. In the triad this sharing may be a good deal less complete, in particular as it relates to the number of areas covered. The threesome may have a single or at best several areas of common interest. These areas of common interest tend to lie

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[1]Robert Dubin, The World of Work (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1958), p. 100.

> outside the immediate intimate experience of the three members.[1]

From the observations of the investigator, no significant difference between the pair and the triad groups could be seen other than the number involved. Both fit Dubin's definition of the pair type association. Both types shared common outside interests as mentioned by Dubin in relation to the triad. Both groups exhibited a distinct division of labor and the role of leader. Perhaps under more stable circumstances which could be found in a factory or office, one would find the differences between these two group types which Dubin maintains exist.

Both the pair and the triad were infrequent groupings in this particular organization, although they did exist in isolated cases. Even when these did develop, membership in one or the other did not exclude membership in a larger social group. Group membership can and does overlap, even in the same work organization. This larger group to which the investigator is referring is known as the "clique". He must disagree with Dubin's statement that, "The common interest binding the clique together is shared animosity, rather than feelings of like-mindedness and fellowship found in the pair, the triad, and the

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[1]Ibid., p. 101.

primary association."[1] The situation Dubin describes fits many cases in work organizations as well as in society at large. It has on various occasions been applicable in the organization under study.

The investigator would prefer to label such groups simply as "interest groups" and to think of a clique in the same terms as Leonard R. Sayles does in his work, Behavior of Industrial Work Groups. Sayles uses the term "friendship clique" to refer to groups " . . . whose members are attracted to each other because they gain certain satisfactions from their interactions as such."[2] Sayles goes on to discuss the factors which help to originate and perpetuate such cliques:

> At the workplace we thus find an intricate maze of friendship groups representing the diverse interests of the workers who have been placed there by the organization. The exact boundaries of these multiple clusterings appear to reflect the off-the-job interests and associations of the employees, or their previous work experience. As common observation would have it, like-minded individuals are attracted to one another. Age, ethnic background, outside activities, sex, marital status, and so on, comprise the mortar that binds the clique together.[3]

In the organization involved here, only one such social group or clique has existed for the past twelve

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[1]Ibid., p. 103.

[2]Leonard R. Sayles, Behavior of Industrial Work Groups (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958), p. 144.

[3]Ibid., p. 145.

years. The members of this clique are the only workers on the crew who regularly socialize off the job. Activities such as hunting and fishing, parties, helping each other with jobs around the home, and just plain visiting are common among clique members. Clique membership is open to all crew members. The qualifications are few. To state it as simply as possible, the clique revolves around the Union Hall. Any fellow crew member who regularly frequents the Union Hall after work and drinks with the boys becomes a member. As long as one attends the so-called "union meetings" once in a while, he remains a member in good standing. Nonmembers include those who do not drink and under-aged student trainees. These workers are neither deliberately persecuted nor ignored while on the job. In fact they are generally anxious and delighted to hear accounts from the previous evening's "union meeting".

In larger organizations, still other social groupings would no doubt arise among the workers. Perhaps some new social groups will form in this particular company. In any event, this section was intended to describe the social groupings found in this particular organization as observed by the investigator.

III. The Home Guard

The home guard is a specialized type of informal group. It acts as an informal, conservative power agent interested in maintaining the status quo. It generally resists outside intervention or interference of any kind. Attempted innovations by management would be considered outside interference by the home guard. This group is usually made up by those who have been on the job longest, those with seniority.[1]

In a small work organization such as the one involved in this study, the home guard is by necessity also small. However, from the investigator's observations, support of this group is a relative matter depending upon who or what is threatening the status quo. In a previous section concerning changing techniques, it was mentioned that the crew felt threatened by and did oppose the change from brushing woodwork to spraying it. In that particular situation, even the flunkies supported the home guard's opposition to the change out of the fear that they would no longer be needed. Subsequent smaller changes which have occurred were generally opposed only by the home guard itself, especially if the change would affect finish work procedures.

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[1]Stone, "The Gold Miner," op. cit., p. 66.

Worker support of the home guard fluctuated for other reasons as well. In certain cases when a member or small segment of the crew behaved in an irresponsible manner, the informal power of the home guard would be brought into play. This has occurred on various occasions when an extraordinary amount of "goofing off" took place among a group of flunkies who were working together without supervision. The more experienced workers would find this distasteful for two reasons. First, it may damage the reputation of the company and even their public image as they perceive it. This fear can best be illustrated by a comment such as, "Damn it, those stupid kids are going to make us all look like a bunch of jackasses." Secondly, it may cause the boss to "come down hard" on the entire crew. In situations such as this, even the experienced part-timers became temporary supporters of the home guard. Such cases were handled by the home guard effectively and informally. The next time they worked with one of the "offenders" they would "work the kid's butt off and teach him what work is all about."

The home guard could even successfully oppose the boss on certain issues. On occasions when the boss would stop at a job and suggest that something be done differently than it normally was, the skilled painter might argue vehemently against such a change and would in many cases

win out.

The home guard stood out clearest and was most easily observed in relation to itinerants. Since itinerants constitute a phenomenon especially characteristic of the building industry, it was decided to devote a separate section of this chapter to that topic.

IV. Itinerants

As has been previously mentioned, building workers tend to function as independent units, each pursuing employment and making arrangements to apply his skills according to personal contacts, personal preference, and a personal schedule. Other than a few regulars, craft shops tend to have a rather high employee turnover rate. It is in reference to these workers that the term "itinerant" is being used.

The investigator is using three criteria in order to identify itinerants in this study. The criteria is based for the most part on his personal observations. Strangely enough, length of employment is not one of them. The word itself infers that an itinerant does not remain in one place for a long period of time. The length of time is relative. In this case, the time of employment can vary from one day to a few years--a few months normally being the maximum. The criteria being used here are as follows: (1) the worker tends to be very individualistic,

i.e., strong-minded, out-spoken; in a group situation for example, if he wants to do one thing and the group another, he would go his own way. (2) The itinerant misses an abnormally high number of work days. He may not even call in sick or on the other hand, he may have the most sophisticated or heart rendering excuses imaginable. (3) The itinerant usually drinks but not always excessively. Again, these characteristics of an itinerant are based purely on the investigator's observations of various workers during a twelve year period.

What has mystified the investigator is why these men, when offered a job in a stable organization at competitive wages and are assured of year round work, leave and move on. They usually claim it is because of a difference of opinion with the boss, but that is nothing more than a convenient excuse in most cases. An explanation offered by Leonard R. Sayles answers this question to a certain extent.

> Where cliques are largely nonexistent, . . . turnover can be enormous. The presumption is that stable social groups take time to crystallize: during the period of formation many potential members will leave voluntarily because they do not find an established unit with which they can affiliate. . . .[1]

To compound this situation, a new painter must always go through a period of "proving himself" to the home guard, especially if he starts out high on the wage

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[1]Sayles, op. cit., p. 146.

scale. In fact, in this particular organization, any new worker who exhibited the three characteristics listed above was never accepted by the home guard. Many ideas and techniques which some itinerants bring with them from past experience are opposed by the home guard and go unaccepted. The investigator has observed that in some cases, the new techniques are adopted only after the itinerant has moved on. The home guard is extremely critical of the fact that the itinerant drinks; any work that he misses is of course a result of drinking as far as they are concerned. On the other hand, drinking by the regulars is accepted as normal.

The absence of cliques and the obstacles presented by the home guard go a long way in the opinion of the observer in explaining why itinerants move on. One brief case history should help add credence to the investigator's contention that this is the case. Painter A came to town and obtained employment with the company. He was a skilled painter with many years experience. He also epitomized the three characteristics described earlier. In his particular case, he became closely associated with one of the regulars and the two became a "pair group". He worked for a number of years but was never accepted by the home guard. In fact, it was almost a running battle between him and the guard.

It was nearly impossible for them to work on the same job together. Eventually, his friend was injured on the job and could not work for a time. Months went by as he remained on the crew waiting to see when and if his partner could come back to work. Finally, the injured painter decided to try a less strenuous occupation instead of coming back to paint. With his only unit of affiliation gone, the itinerant packed his belongings and was on the move again.

V. Production Control

> Restriction of production is commonly found at all levels irrespective of occupation. It may be direct or indirect, sporadic or persistent, boss-ordered or spontaneous. In almost all cases it is related to the concept of a fair day's work. There is a group tendency to keep observable production within the capacity range of the average worker. Two important rules are, therefore, that the worker should not overproduce and be a "rate buster"; neither should he underproduce and be a "chiseler". . . .[1]

In the organization being studied, a worker finds himself a member of many different team groups. Team group membership can remain fixed over a period of weeks in certain isolated situations, or as more often happens, team group membership varies from day to day. Each team develops its own norms of behavior and production depending upon the membership. Because of this, many practices regarding the rate of production were observed.

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[1]Miller and Form, op. cit., p. 283.

The incidences of rate busting were both few and rather difficult to measure. To digress just a bit, rate busting is most common among new workers. Most new workers are also itinerants. If they are skilled and work at a high rate, the established members of the crew who make up the home guard naturally resent this and it intensifies their rejection of the new man.

Chiseling very seldom happens and when it does, the worker is eventually ostracized. Before this occurs however, the boss usually learns about it and "lets the man go". When one is not doing his fair share of the work, it is more often because he lacks the skill rather than a deliberate attempt at chiseling.

An interesting observation reported by Dr. George Strauss in an unpublished study showed that in some cases, high productivity is positively correlated to high grievance activity.[1] An example of this which the investigator observed involved a team group of three painters who worked together for a number of months painting walls. Their grievance involved wages and hours. They wanted a raise and they also wanted to start work earlier and finish earlier. In order to obtain their demands, they substantially raised their rate of production and held it at a high level over an extended period of time. The owner was very pleased

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[1]Sayles, op. cit., p. 112.

but continually refused to give in to their demands. This resulted in dissatisfaction on their part and they finally accepted defeat. Of course, the high rate of production suddenly decreased until it resumed at the normal level.

"In a number of the studies of the Survey Research Center, 'pride in work group' is one of the major correlates, and one of the few consistent correlates of high productivity."[1] This was observed many times by the investigator. Workers who worked well together, who enjoyed working together would invariably put out much more energy and work whenever they were assigned to the same team group. They would take great pleasure in expounding on the amount of work which they were able to accomplish together.

However, this does not always occur. There can be significant differences in the level of production from one cohesive work group to another. Each has its own group standards and these standards can change depending upon the circumstances. The investigator has observed countless times the speeding up of production in order to finish on time. Even if this meant working at a high level all day long. It usually only involved the last hour or two in the work day. At the same time, production could be slowed

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[1]Ibid., p. 113.

in order to stretch the work out over the entire day. This might occur so that the men would not have to move to and start a new job with only one or two hours left in the day. In isolated cases, production would be slowed so that the men might gain an hour or so of overtime. The flexibility of this behavior and the almost automatic manner in which it occurs is an amazing process to see in action.

VI. Informal Practices

> Much activity of an informal nature goes on in most work groups. Apparently technical behavior and union participation are rarely so arranged as to provide people with sufficient and satisfactory social relationships. They invariably devise social activities of all kinds to relieve the boredom of monotonous work, to obtain release from job tensions, to compensate for unsatisfactory social relationships, or to fulfill an endless variety of social demands.[1]

The nature of painting allows room for much informal behavior to take place. Such behavior includes simple conversation, story telling, practical joking, horseplay, gambling, smoke breaks and occasionally beer breaks. The extent of such activities varies with the make-up of the team group and the privacy of the particular job. If the boss, foreman or a member of the home guard is a part of the team group, then informal behavior is limited pretty

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[1]Miller and Form, op. cit., p. 271.

much to conversation. If the job is within the public's view, such as an occupied home or business, the nature and extent of such behavior is also limited.

Idle conversation among painters is almost always possible. Yelling from room to room or from one side of a house to another is common. The topics discussed are as varied as are the conversationalists themselves. Sex is a favorite topic, especially if a young student trainee is present. "Expert" advice is given freely and very colorfully in such situations. A radio is usually available and the "talk shows" are always good for stimulating conversation.

Practical jokes are a common occurrence and usually involve the use of paint. Common practices include such things as painting the backs of another's shoes while he is standing on a step ladder. If this is done successfully, the man on the ladder will not detect what is going on until it is too late. If he does discover it, the worker on the floor may get a brush full of paint on top of his head. Many times it proves foolish to leave one's pot of paint and brush unattended. The brush might be sticking handle first in the paint when the owner returns. If the roller man leaves the roller unattended, he may return and pick it up by the handle only to discover that the underside of the handle has just been freshly painted. The same

principle works well when one leaves his ladder unguarded. These are messy but harmless pranks and are enjoyed by all because it is always possible for one to "get even". Splattering paint "accidentally" on the person nearest you or tampering with another worker's tool box are not usually appreciated. On one occasion a dead mouse was carefully concealed in the bottom of a worker's tool box. Needless to say this did not "go over" very big.

Horseplay is a rather uncommon practice. Occasionally a friendly wrestling match between the younger and more energetic workers may take place. Water fights may develop while using a water hose to clean the paint equipment. A more dangerous activity involves giving the base of an aluminum ladder a quick rap with a hammer when someone is on the other end of it. The noise and vibrations caused are extremely unnerving.

For the most part, gambling is limited to friendly bets on football games and the like. No doubt gambling with cards or dice occurs among painters while on the job in some organizations, but this activity has never been observed by the investigator in this particular company. Although not actually a form of gambling, a unique practice involves brush dropping. Whenever a painter accidentally drops his brush, it becomes his responsibility to buy a beer for all the men with whom he is working. The others

usually make sure this obligation is taken care of as soon as possible.

Taking short breaks to have a smoke or grab a cup of coffee can occur many times. It logically happens whenever a natural "breaking point" in the work is reached. These points occur whenever a painter must stop to get more paint, move his ladder, get into a different color, start a new room and so on. Taking a beer break is an activity which was practiced much less frequently. This would take place under certain conditions. First, the team membership must be such that all were in agreement. Secondly, they must be working out of town or at a time when the whereabouts of the boss could be known for sure. If working in town, beer would be brought to the job and a constant lookout maintained. If working out of town, the men would most likely go to the local tavern for their coffee break. These "fifteen minute" coffee breaks had a way of stretching into all afternoon affairs.

The type and range of informal behavior obviously varies from occupation to occupation. The occupational environment and the life styles of the workers themselves are reflected in the informal activities carried on. Some of the practices described in this section are unique to this occupation; others are ubiquitous in nature.

VII. Informal Communication

The Grapevine

The informal channel of communication which invariably develops whenever groups are established within an organizational framework is commonly referred to as the grapevine. The sophistication and rigidity of the grapevine varies from group to group and from organization to organization. The grapevine functions as a carrier of information which might affect all or part of the group or which may only be of interest to the workers. Most workers like to know "what's going on" even if it does not affect them personally.

For all practical purposes, the organization under study lacks a grapevine in the strict sense of the word. There is very little need for one to exist. The men are together as a group every morning before work at which time information is freely exchanged. The makeup of the team groups and the location of the jobs vary from day to day which makes the establishing of any recognizable communication system impossible. If something does occur during the work day, such as a personal injury suffered by one of the men, the boss has been known to travel from job to job informing the workers. Any information which is passed on informally among the workers is purely a matter of gossip. From the investigator's observations,

the channel which a piece of information travels from start to finish and including who is left out and who is told is just a matter of chance. It depends entirely upon one's job assignment for the day.

Argot

"It is one of the characteristic features of distinctive occupations that they develop specialized languages peculiar to the occupations.[1] Various terms have been used in reference to the specialized language which develops within an occupational field; terms such as argot, jargon, slang or slanguage. Sociologists generally accept and use the terms jargon and argot. Some writers use them interchangeably; others distinguish between them. To distinguish between them, "Miller and Form call jargon, 'the technical or secret vocabulary of art, trade, profession or special groups; and argot 'the conventionalized slang of a work group'".[2] However, the specialized occupational languages which they refer to have one function in common which Robert Dubin discusses in his book, The World of Work.

> An occupational argot serves to identify the member of an occupation and to distinguish him from those outside the occupation. Furthermore, it serves to protect the occupation from

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[1]Dubin, The World of Work, op. cit., p. 341.

[2]Stone, op. cit., p. 73.

> the intrusion of the outsider. An outsider readily betrays himself by his failure to use the right language at the right time. . . .[1]

Among painters, terms are used to refer to various tasks or techniques such as to box, cut, face out, prime in, rub out, stipple, underline and numerous others. Other terms refer to various parts of a house or equipment which the painter uses, such as the airless, angle, base, facer, gun, overhang, slabs and spinner. Some of these may be new to the reader; others have been used in previous sections.

To better appreciate how hopelessly lost an outsider would be, the following is an example of the paint contractor giving directions to a team group before they leave the shop in the morning. "It's a split so you will probably need a couple twenty-eights, a twelve and a couple fives. Be sure to cork the brick. Use oil for the primer and you should probably use a four inch bristle. We're going to start the wood this afternoon so take the small compressor and a long cord. Sometime before lunch strip it and blow the base so it will be ready for spraying. Before you finish coat it, be sure you drop everything good and box the paint. If you've got enough time, one of you can put in an angle."

The painters would take this to mean that the house

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[1]Dubin, op. cit., p. 342.

is a split-level and that two twenty-eight foot, one twelve foot and two five foot ladders will be needed. Be sure to caulk the space between the brick and the siding. An oil base paint should be used to prime the bare wood and a four inch wide bristle brush should be used for this. Before the wood finishing crew gets there, take the hardware off the doors and windows and using the air compressor, blow the dirt away from the baseboard. Before final coating the outside, use drop cloths to cover everything that should be covered and mix all the paint together in case the color varies a little from gallon to gallon. If you see that you're going to be able to finish the siding in plenty of time, one painter is to start on the trim using a small angle brush.

Many other terms could be included in this section although a complete listing would be impossible because some expressions vary from one group of painters to another.

Chapter 7

WORK AND THE SELF

"A man's work," says E. C. Hughes, "is one of the most important parts of his social identity, of his self; indeed, of his fate in the one life he has to live."[1] Following this line of thought then:

> One of the guiding assumptions of the sociology of work is that the self-conception of the individual is shaped and modified by the type of work he does. To what extent this occurs is a research problem. Thus we look to the amount of ego-involvement in the specific tasks performed, and in the occupation itself. Of particular interest to the vocational counselor is the selective nature of work so far as personalities are concerned. . . . What personality characteristics are easily identified with an occupation, or set of tasks? Again, what are the aspirations of workers, or what aspirations go with the kind of work performed? . . .
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> . . . On the other hand what are the potential mistakes at work that can dog the minds of the workers? . . . How are mistakes handled and in what context? On the other hand, what factions in the job give rise to self-gratification? What constitute a "good day" and a "bad day" in the round of work? Also, what are the dirty-work aspects of the job? What tasks are high in their prestige value, and which are low? What tasks are designated, despised, and if possible sloughed off to lesser, statused workers?[2]

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[1] Sigmund Nosow and William H. Form (eds.), Man, Work, and Society: A Reader in the Sociology of Occupations (New York: Basic Books Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), p. 441.

[2] B. R. Stone, "The Gold Miner: A Study in the Sociology of an Occupation" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1962), pp. 77-8.

I. Ego-Involvement in Tasks

The degree to which one becomes emotionally involved in his work and derives satisfaction from it depends upon different factors and may vary accordingly.

Physical Environment

The physical environment within which one works is bound to influence the amount of involvement one has with the task at hand. The physical environment includes such things as temperature, humidity, ventilation, lighting and noise. In painting, the environment changes depending upon if one is working inside or outside. If outside, it may vary from hour to hour and naturally season to season. The physical environment also may depend upon the particular task a painter is performing. For instance, on a hot summer day, one painter could be working outside in the sun but a gentle breeze may provide for a pleasant environment. On the same job, a worker may be painting walls on the inside. He is out of the hot sun but the breeze makes it necessary to keep the windows closed while he rolls the walls in order to keep the paint from splattering on the woodwork. Since water base paint is being used, the environment becomes very uncomfortable due to the high humidity.

In factory work, the physical environment usually remains relatively stable day after day and may, if the

conditions are not good, work against a high degree of ego-involvement on the worker's part. On occasions when painters are working under very adverse environmental conditions, one would expect a corresponding low degree of ego-involvement in the tasks being performed. Surprisingly, the investigator has observed the exact opposite on many occasions. Knowing that the uncomfortable conditions will not last, the men tend to take it as a challenge and put much more of themselves into accomplishing the task. When these conditions persist; such as an extended heat wave, the degree of personal involvement tends to decline.

Ventilation, lighting and noise are conditions which also vary according to the task being performed. Working in a house where lacquer is being sprayed is a very uncomfortable situation. The windows may be wide open but the odor persists. Many painters, other than the trigger man himself, tend to "hurry things" in order to finish the task as quickly as possible. The noise of the spray machine limits the amount of conversation possible and gets on the nerves of some of the painters. From the investigator's observations, poor lighting conditions seem to be the most important environmental factor causing low levels of ego-involvement on the part of painters. If a

painter cannot see his work, he has no way of knowing how well he is doing.

Fatigue

Fatigue is a difficult phenomenon to measure. There are different causes and types of fatigue and it may manifest itself in various ways. In relation to work, Henry C. Smith states that "fatigue is the reduction in the ability to do work because of previous work done."[1]

Naturally if a painter is fatigued, he will have difficulty in developing and maintaining ego-involvement in the task he is assigned to perform.

Certain tasks tend to take more out of a painter than others. For example, tasks which involve ladder work. Climbing up and down a thirty foot ladder can be extremely fatiguing and yet it is important to remain alert. Rolling overhangs from the ground is also a physically tiring task. Since one does not perform these tasks regularly, his body does not become as conditioned to this particular work as it otherwise would. Performing these tasks under adverse environmental conditions, takes that much more out of a worker. These men are more apt to stop for frequent smoke breaks than are men who perform other tasks. They are more

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[1]Henry C. Smith, Psychology of Industrial Behavior (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1955), p. 36.

likely to go out of their way to strike up a conversation with fellow workers in order to take short rests.

Monotony and Skill

To an outsider, many occupations can appear monotonous. The investigator has always been surprised at the great number of people who believe that painting "must be one of the more boring jobs in the world". Much of this is due simply to the fact that they are not aware of the many facets of painting. Naturally some tasks are more monotonous than others, and due to individual differences, a task may be monotonous to one but not to another.

Many painters express displeasure when being assigned a job on which they will have to clean woodwork, rub woodwork, putty nail holes, tape out, roll walls and so forth. In fact, the lesser skilled tasks are those which painters tend to find most monotonous. Robert Dubin touches on this point when he states:

> We may conclude, then, that people doing more difficult and more skilled tasks get more rewards from their work in the form of job satisfaction. In particular, they seem to enjoy the variety of their work and the sense of personal responsibility they have for doing it.[1]

The less experienced workers are usually delegated the preparatory tasks which require little skill in their

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[1]Robert Dubin, The World of Work (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1958), p. 242.

performance. The monotony of these tasks may partially explain the relatively large amount of horseplay which usually occurs among these workers. This behavior and the flunkie's ego-involvement in his work changes drastically when given a brush and allowed to do some painting. He has become a painter.

II. Ego-Involvement in Occupation

Ego-involvement in an occupation can vary from worker to worker and from occupation to occupation. The degree to which one is occupation oriented is influenced by numerous factors.

The skills a painter has developed over an extended period of time can be a major determining factor. If a significant period of the worker's life has been devoted to acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to perform his work, his self-involvement in the occupation is likely to be high. The investigator has observed the pride in their work which skilled painters manifest. Many enjoy painting in public places where passers-by may stop and comment on the work they are doing. Some have specialty areas in which they excel and are honored when picked by their fellow workers to perform such a task. For example, a particular painter may be faster and better at trimming

windows than anyone else on the crew. He takes pride in his work and in being referred to as "the best damn winder man on the crew". The same holds true for many other tasks. The investigator has observed different painters being referred to as good "oil men," "ladder men," and many others.

While acquiring skill, the painter is also acquiring seniority. A certain amount of security usually accompanies seniority and although many painters may drift from one contractor to another, most feel secure knowing that they can find work.

Among painters, the spray man would be considered as a specialty man. In many occupations a worker specializes in a certain area after having learned the work in general. In such cases the man is likely to feel a high ego-involvement in the occupation. The opposite is many times true in the case of spray men. Some, upon entering the field, are trained to spray and not to paint. When this is the case, the tendency is toward low ego-involvement.

Ego-involvement is also related to the aspiration level of the painter. One would suspect that among aspiring apprentices in the union, ego-involvement would be high. In the organization under observation, this very seldom occurs. One is either a painter or a flunky, and the

flunkies are almost always students who do not look at painting as their future occupation. Among the painters, aspiration levels vary, but usually correspond with the actual levels of attainment available in the company. They know that they will never own the company nor will they become second in charge until the owner's son assumes leadership upon his father's retirement. Most do aspire however to be recognized as skilled craftsmen by their fellow workers. Naturally, a secure and financially comfortable future is desired also. A few painters observed over the past twelve years have aspired to become painting contractors. Ego-involvement in the occupation for these men tended to be very high.

The company one works for and the men he works with affects the degree of involvement one has with an occupation. The consensus of opinion is virtually unanimous regarding this subject. In the words of one of the regulars, "You're crazy to quit. You might make more money an hour somewhere else but you sure as hell won't have the steady work. You could stay here and work the rest of your life. When the old man leaves, . . . will take over and the work will still be here. Besides, where are ya going to find a better bunch of guys to drink with?"

III. Dirty Work

Laymen tend to classify occupations in general terms, such as manual or nonmanual and clean or dirty. Many times manual and dirty are one in the same in the layman's mind. When thinking in terms of dirty, he usually has reference to physical dirtiness. Sociologists look at this from a different perspective. They maintain that every occupation contains its dirty work. The aspects of an occupation which are considered to be dirty work are defined as such by the workers in that occupation. The following quotation clearly describes what sociologists mean when they refer to "dirty work".

> In every occupation and in every profession, there are aspects of work which are thought of as being demeaning, sheer drudgery, of low prestige, i.e., the dirty work of the bundle of tasks which make up the job, or position. But for many occupations, dirty work cannot be seen literally as involving physical dirt, or filth; rather, it more likely means menial work, arduous work, work marginal to one's occupation, even unethical work.[1]

As in other occupations then, certain tasks which must be performed by painters are considered by them to be dirty work. The investigator contends however, that dirty work is a relative matter. Workers in the same occupation may view a certain task differently. What is boring and

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[1]Stone, op. cit., p. 98.

arduous to one, another might find rather enjoyable. This may, but usually does not occur when the men are fairly equal regarding their position. This is common however when the workers are on different levels in the organization. For instance, much of the preparatory work performed by flunkies is considered to be demeaning and sheer drudgery by the experienced painters. Whenever possible, they will try to delegate these tasks to the less experienced men. On the other hand, the flunkies do not always look at these tasks in the same manner.

Both elements do agree on certain tasks which are considered as dirty work. Scraping paint, especially on farm buildings, would be one. The only thing worse would be having to do it alone. In twelve years the investigator has never met one painter, experienced or not, who did not abhor this task. Another task considered to be dirty work is the extensive sanding of soft wood or the wire brushing of paint which is powdering. The fortunate would find these tasks arduous at best. The less fortunate, with the constant breathing in of the fine particles of wood or paint, would be plagued for days after by hemorrhaging nasal passages. Other preparatory tasks are considered to be dirty work by some and not by others. There is one task which is so considered by all and which has not yet been mentioned. This is the task of steaming off old

wallpaper. By using special equipment which creates steam and by directly applying this steam to the wallpaper, the paste which holds the paper to the wall can be softened enough so that the paper may be scraped off the wall with a putty knife. All openings to the room should be kept closed and as much steam created as possible. Besides being very much like sitting in a steam bath for eight hours, it is an extremely sticky and messy operation. It is also a potentially dangerous and painful job.

IV. Personality Selection

> Social and cultural climates create conditions which affect individuals in patterned ways. Theory holds that, given a certain social milieu, persons playing various culturally defined roles will take on certain personality attributes. It follows that particular types of social climates found in occupational life contribute to certain behavioral outcomes both on the job and in the wider community.[1]

This theory is accepted by many sociologists but it suggests various questions which should be answered in relation to it. If an occupation does affect and modify a worker's personality, to what extent does this take place and does the amount of affect differ from one occupation to another? Does the degree of ego-involvement one has in an occupation determine whether or not and to what extent such a process occurs? How many of the personality

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[1]Nosow and Form, Man, Work, and Society, op. cit., p. 441.

characteristics were present prior to joining the occupation and to what extent did the occupation select the personality? These and other questions along this line are as yet unanswered; the investigator can only offer his observations and hope they shed a little light on the problem.

As stated previously, painters tend to be very independent and individualistic in nature. Painting offers them the opportunity to be individualists in that each does his own work. In arriving at a job, he is usually the one who must decide how to go about it, at least as far as his own task is concerned. Even though he may perform a task over and over, each time offers a new challenge. In this respect painting is not a monotonous occupation. Many educators return summer after summer to paint when they could earn more elsewhere.

"Like father, like son" is an old cliche' but is quite accurate and common in painting as far as a son following in his father's occupation is concerned. In fact, this tendency is common in all occupations. The investigator was surprised however, to discover how common it is for brothers to take up painting as an occupation. In some cases, three or more brothers may all be painters. In some of these cases the brothers exhibited extremely different personalities.

Heavy drinking seems to be a characteristic commonly attributed to painters. Many people have the house painter stereotyped as an undependable drunk. The investigator believes this to be the image which much of the public has of the painter. This image appears to be more common among older members of the public. His belief is based upon the countless number of comments he has heard to this effect over the past twelve year period. The question which has always interested the investigator is simple; are painters drinkers or are drinkers painters?

This comes back to the basic question concerning personality and occupation. Does the occupation shape the personality or does the occupation select a person with a certain personality? It is the investigator's belief that painting tends to draw a certain personality type to the occupation; that drinkers become painters rather than painters become drinkers.

Although the researcher never actually questioned painters on this subject, bits and pieces of many conversations with them has led him to this conclusion. The fact that painting is a "convenient" occupation came across clearly. A person can almost always get a job with a paint contractor in order to make some steady money. If not, he can easily find some work to do on his own. By simply sitting in a bar, a painter can often pick up small jobs

in order to make "a few bucks". If not, he simply moves to another bar or another town. Thus, the itinerant painter stays on the move and through his contacts with the public, creates or reinforces the picture of the "drunken painter".

V. Mistakes Before Peers

Mistakes are bound to happen as painters go about their work. This is only natural considering the many different tasks which must be performed and the varying skill levels of the individual workers. The damage which a mistake causes is considered rather unimportant by the painter unless it requires a substantial expenditure of time and money to correct or it results in personal injury. How common mistakes are usually handled by the men who make them is an important subject in the study of an occupation.

Mistakes which result in personal injuries to painters are relatively uncommon in the type of painting done by this organization and others like it. When severe injuries do occur, ladder work is usually involved. Knowing this, most painters take precautionary measures whenever high work is done. This is especially true when the surface upon which the ladder is resting is uneven, hard, or both. In such cases it is not uncommon to find a painter doing nothing all day except helping to move

ladders. When he is not moving ladders, he will stand at the foot of a ladder in order to stop it if it starts to slide out from under its occupant. Under windy conditions or when very high work is being done, the ladders will be securely tied down with ropes.

As previously stated however, most mistakes are of less import and do not involve personal injury. Naturally, most mistakes involve the use of paint. Dripping or spilling paint on surfaces which should have been covered with drop cloths is a common occurrence. This is caused by simple neglect. A few drips are not too important, but a half gallon of paint on a roof or cement is another matter. Using the wrong color paint in a particular room can occasionally happen as can using the wrong kind of paint. Many other examples might be given but the important question is how these mistakes are handled by those who commit them. Since most painters take pride in their work and the skill it takes to perform it, one's performance tends to be evaluated by his peers in an effort to rank his ability. To freely admit one's mistakes is to lay oneself open to peer ridicule and possibly a lower evaluation. The investigator has observed a rather common behavior pattern utilized for protection. The following section will discuss this behavior pattern and its variations.

VI. Protection from Criticism

When a minor mistake is made, one's first concern is invariably its discovery by others. A very common mistake will be used here as an example. This mistake occurs when the painter who is rolling walls hits the ceiling with his roller leaving a splotch of paint, simply referred to as a "roller mark". In most cases, a damp rag will remove most of the paint, but a mark will always be there. If it is very noticeable or someone such as the building contractor complains about it, the entire ceiling will have to be painted. The investigator knows how easy it is to make this mistake and it is usually true that the more experience and skill one has, the less often he will commit this act.

If it is immediately noticed by others, the most common reaction is to try to rationalize. A comment heard many times was, "I've been pushing this damn roller all day, anybody's going to hit the ceiling once in awhile." Occasionally an attempt to project the blame is tried. One may blame the roller pole by claiming that it is warped, too long, too short, or the threads are striped and it can not be screwed tightly enough to the roller handle. The most common projection occurs when the guilty party says to the man cutting the ceiling in, "Hell, it's not my fault.

If you'd cut it in as wide as you're supposed to instead of moving like a bat out of hell, I wouldn't have to get so close to the ceiling and it wouldn't happen. Slow down, you ain't going anywhere."

In the event the roller man is in a room alone, he will try to remove as much as possible in order to cover it up. He then has two possibilities. He may choose not to mention it and hope it goes unnoticed, or he may immediately bring it to everyone's attention by politely claiming that the cutter must have done it with his brush. The cutter is caught unaware and naturally he has no knowledge of it although he knows that he might have done it without noticing it. He will go to take a look at it in an effort to determine if it looks like a brush mark or a roller mark. If he disagrees with the roller, everyone on the job usually stops work to examine it and give their expert opinion. At this point it is too late to blame someone since there is a questionable doubt as to who is to blame. If he chose not to mention it but it is discovered later that day, the roller usually denies any knowledge of it while at the same time mentioning the possibility that the cutter might have done it. Again, it is difficult to lay blame and also the importance of doing so has diminished somewhat with the passage of time.

Ultimately it is hoped that it will go unnoticed which

it sometimes does. Occasionally however, when the house is sold a few days or weeks later, the new owners will notice it and ask the contractor about it who in turn approaches the painting contractor. If the boss confronts the men about it the next morning as he usually does, an award winning performance begins. Rather than attempting to pin-point blame, the goal now is for all to escape the blame and criticism from the boss or to spread it out so that as many as possible share it. The men cannot remember who worked in that particular house, in fact some cannot even remember the house itself. If the team group is determined, no one can remember exactly who did what. Tasks were traded so that each man did some rolling; it could have been any one of the men. In the end each man concedes that he might have done it without noticing it at the time. The guilty party has thus been saved from shouldering all the blame and criticism.

Chapter 8

INTERRELATIONSHIPS

> The subject matter of sociology is the human group, of human beings in association with one another. The group may be a highly organized bureaucracy or a loosely-knit and disorderly crowd. In either case the sociologist is concerned with the behavior of the members of the group as they interact with one another, and with the regularities or patterns of behavior which exist between them. In a formally organized work group, the researcher pays special attention to the relationships as they exist between superiors, subordinates, and peers. The nature of such relationships is an essential part of the study of an occupation.[1]

I. Superior-Subordinate Relationships

The individuality and informality which pervades the building industry has already been alluded to on several occasions. A previous section of this work concerning formal authority has partially discussed the superior-subordinate relationships as they exist in this particular organization.

The relationship between the contractor and the workers is almost entirely on an informal basis. The investigator would call it a "close" relationship in most

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[1] B. R. Stone, "The Gold Miner: A Study in the Sociology of an Occupation" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1962), p. 113.

instances. An outsider could easily mistake the owner for one of the workers if observed in certain situations. He will occasionally eat, work, joke and swear, with the men. Playing golf and attending football or basketball games with some of the men is not uncommon. His total treatment of the workers could best be described as "paternalistic". Finding homes and cars for the men, loaning equipment, giving advice and help when needed are normal practices. On the job however, ultimate authority rests with him.

Social contacts initiated by the regular workers are not as a rule as informal and "close" as those initiated by the contractor. The following statement quoted from one of the regulars should help explain why this is so. "I'll tell you, it's really weird. He's like Jekyll and Hyde. One minute he acts like he's going to put you in his will and the next it's like he doesn't know you're alive." Consequently, informal socializing with the boss is initiated by regulars only when it is apparent what type of "mood" the contractor is in. The situation is reversed concerning matters such as work techniques, conditions, and wages. In such cases as these, the following statement by Richard R. Myers holds true. "Skilled tradesmen in building suffer little from shyness or apprehension in dealing with

employers, individually or collectively."[1] A regular will not hesitate discussing or arguing such matters with the contractor.

The pattern is completely reversed when one observes the part-time workers. They are much more likely to initiate informal conversation with the boss. Joking with the boss and mild horseplay in his presence are commonly initiated by these workers. There are probably a variety of explanations for this behavior, some more obvious than others, but this falls outside the scope of the present research. A part-time worker's behavior concerning the job itself is completely opposite the behavior exhibited by a regular. The contractor's word is law and tasks are performed as he instructs them to be.

II. Peer Relationships

All crew members below the contractor are being classified here as peers. The contractor's son would be the only notable exception, but only while on the job. Naturally the prestige and rank of individual workers varies according to skill and seniority.

Other than the fact that the least skilled worker usually gets the least skill demanding task, permanently

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[1]Sigmund Nosow and William H. Form (eds.), Man, Work, and Society: A Reader in the Sociology of Occupations (New York: Basic Books Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), p. 128.

patterned relationships among the workers are almost non-existent. The investigator feels that this is due to the fact that team groups are constantly changing in membership. Even though individual functions on the job are interrelated, adjustments must constantly be made in terms of work pace and the personal idiosyncrasies of other team members. Team groups must develop temporary social norms which vanish as soon as the work day ends. The heterogeneous makeup of this work organization is a further consideration. During one period in the investigator's employment, the crew contained one painter who could neither read nor write and another who was a college graduate. The college graduate has been with the organization for over twelve years. Itinerant workers and college oriented part-timers add to this heterogeneity already present among the regulars.

The nature of the work situation functions to counteract the high degree of heterogeneity found among the workers. The cooperation demanded and the large amount of individual freedom enables the men to converse and interact on the job which helps foster relationships that are continued outside the work situation. These interrelationships tend to form on any one of the following three bases: age, drinking, sports. The student trainees, being approximately the same

age, many times begin to interact socially away from the work environment. The group of men who form the only continuous clique are those who regularly gather for a few beers at the "Hall". Interrelationships based on sports are somewhat seasonal in duration although in most cases they are members of the previously mentioned clique.

Chapter 9

PUBLIC IMAGE

Of all parameters used by sociologists in determining an individual's social status, occupation is generally accepted as the most important and accurate. The public's image of an occupation determines its eventual rank in the occupational hierarchy. B. R. Stone has the following to say about the importance of an occupation's public image:

> Work is seldom performed in the absence of some conception of a clientele or consuming body. There are, in the sociologist's terminology "significant others," various groups which in one way or another hold values toward the work one performs. It is the research duty of those in the sociology of work to identify these insofar as they exist, and to show when possible the extent to which such "public images" affect the worker's self-conception and his rationalization toward them. The importance of being well thought of by the public at large or by a specific public may transcend the actual need.[1]

I. The Worker's Viewpoint

The investigator's contacts with painters have not been limited to those with whom he has worked for the past

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[1] B. R. Stone, "The Gold Miner: A Study in the Sociology of an Occupation" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1962), p. 125.

twelve years. Before that time and especially since, he has become acquainted with many others. Without perhaps knowing what to call it, most were aware that the public had a stereotypical image of the painter. That the image has to do with "drinking" should come as no surprise to the reader. Considerable import and space has been given to that activity throughout this paper. Most painters are aware that many picture the painter as an "unreliable drunk". Without debating its validity at this point, the fact that many painters "feel" this is the image which the public has of them is all that matters at the moment.

Many painters wish to dispel this image from the public's mind. Some may reject the painter who drinks and refuse to associate with him to the same degree they would a non-drinker. The investigator has observed numerous examples of this behavior in the organization for which he worked.

One such example concerns the company's trucks. As previously mentioned, a fleet of at least three trucks has been maintained for the last few years. Each truck bears the name of the company and the contractor on its sides. Parking one of these trucks anywhere near a tavern was something that just was not done, except during lunch. The reputation and image of the company were given as reasons for this rule.

Further examples of this involved the home guard's automatic rejection of itinerant painters. This has been observed over and over in the last twelve years. This phenomenon was thoroughly discussed in an earlier section on itinerants and need not be reiterated here. The interesting aspect of this rejection of itinerants is that it lasted as long as the itinerant stayed and no matter how little he actually drank. Regular members of the company often drank much more than the itinerant but this was generally accepted and made no difference. "That type" of painter simply did not fit into the organization in the eyes of the home guard.

Interestingly enough, the painters never seemed too concerned about the relative status of the occupation in the overall hierarchy of occupations. The only comparisons they cared to make were with other occupations in the building industry. These included the following groups: bricklayers, carpenters, cement workers, dry wallers, electricians, painters and plumbers. Painters were included in this list because the investigator observed that the men many times enjoyed comparing themselves to other paint crews. He also has observed that painters tend to be quite aware of their relative position when ranked with these other six trades. He has on numerous occasions had people, from many different occupations, rank these trades from top to bottom as to

the prestige they attributed them. Purely as a matter of personal interest and with no claim of statistical validity, the investigator was surprised to find that painters generally ranked themselves below the electricians, plumbers and carpenters as did most other people asked to rank them. Many ranked the bricklayers higher than painters, whereas the painters did not.

In an effort to rationalize for their inferior position in relation to electricians, plumbers and carpenters, the men blamed the weak painters' union. They maintained that if the union (although they were not members) was as strong as the electrician's and plumber's unions, they would be making just as much money and would be ranked right up there with them.

II. The Public's Viewpoint

As the title suggests, the intent of this section is to set forth the image of the occupation as held by the general public. The investigator must admit that he conducted no public survey in order to obtain the material which follows. Some of the material is based on conversations which he had with painters in this particular organization. Some is based on conversations with friends and associates outside the occupation. Painters, although somewhat reluctantly by some, agree with the public's viewpoint.

Finally, by necessity, part of the material is based on the public image as it is conceived to exist by the investigator himself. Although not a permanent member, the researcher has participated in the occupation for some time. He has observed the changes which have taken place and those that are continuing to take place. This he believes, offers a unique vantage point from which observations of this nature may be made. Naturally utmost care will be taken to remain as objective as possible.

The belief that many view the painters as "unreliable drunks" has already been stated. Most painters will admit that this is a popular view taken. This is shown by occasional advertisements one may find in local neighborhood shoppers which read as follows: "Interior or exterior painting wanted. Fifteen years experience. Good worker. Reliable. Non-drinker." The investigator has never seen a similar ad for any other occupation. When or where this image first developed is not known. The grounds for this belief were no doubt more substantial during an earlier period than they are now. In the investigator's opinion this image of the painter has dissipated to a certain extent and is continuing to do so.

Finally, the investigator would like to express a personal conclusion which he has arrived at as a result of

both his experience over the past twelve years and the present study. It was earlier stated, based on information provided by the United States Department of Labor, that the number of painters presently working will continue to be needed in the near future but that the number needed is not expected to rise. The explanation being the increasing number of technological advancements being made. With the paint and equipment available today, the average person can easily and quickly paint his own house. Each summer more and more people can be observed doing this very thing. As an older painter commented to the investigator while watching a young couple paint their new house, "Look at that cheap s.o.b. When I first started painting you hardly ever saw that. With all the stuff they've got, those slobs can paint a house easier than we used to be able to paint a garage. You're lucky you don't plan on doing this for the rest of your life 'cause I got a feeling you'd be looking for a new job." What he was trying to say by this comment and later ones was that the "writing was on the wall". The need for painters as they now are known is diminishing.

Perhaps he was more pessimistic than the situation called for but the investigator believes that even though the number of painters may not drastically fall in the foreseeable future, the status of the occupation will. It will

decline because many of the skills once needed are being replaced by new equipment. As a friend recently said before starting to paint his kitchen, "Why the hell should I pay good money for a painter to do something I can do? The only people who need painters are those who are either too busy or too lazy to do it themselves."

Chapter 10

SUMMARY

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this research was to provide a descriptive analysis of an occupation within a sociological framework. Toward this end, a single work organization was studied. Attempts were made whenever possible, to apply the findings to the occupation as a whole and to workers in general. It was hoped that this paper might yield additional insights into the field of work behavior. As stated in B. R. Stone's "The Gold Miner":

> I have now come to the belief that although the problems of people in these lines of work (the humbler jobs) are as interesting and informative as any other, their deeper value lies in the insights they yield about work behavior in any and all occupations.[1]

With only minor alterations, the research outline followed by the investigator was borrowed from Robert W. Habenstein. Not only did his unpublished paper "Categories of Description and Analysis for the Sociological Study of an Occupation" serve as a useful framework from which to work, it provided valuable insights into this area of research.

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[1]B. R. Stone, "The Gold Miner: A Study in the Sociology of an Occupation" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1962), p. 127.

The research design employed by the investigator throughout this project was that of participant observation. In that this can be a very flexible methodology for conducting research, it was deemed ideal for this particular work. As was brought out in Chapter Two, this research design brings into focus the position of the researcher who proposes to study human group life. That position being one of contact with and participation in the experiences and actions of those he observes.[1]

The investigator did occupy such a position in the work organization described in this paper. For twelve years he was a participating member of this work group. The vast majority of information presented in this work was obtained solely from the direct observations of the investigator. Structured interviews and questioneers were used very sparingly. Until the research was concluded, only one member of the work group studied knew that it had been conducted.

Chapter Three was devoted in part to the interior-exterior paint company studied. The growth of the organization, from only one man in 1944 to over twenty in 1970 was discussed. The fact that the growth of the company was caused and paralleled by that of the community (Clipperton) in which it is located was stressed.

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[1]Severyn T. Bruyn, The Human Perspective in Sociology: The Methodology of Participant Observation (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. vi.

The nature of painting as a type of work was discussed in the fourth chapter. New residential painting was used as the basis for this discussion as it comprised most of the work done by this particular organization. Three major operating areas were delineated: exterior surfaces, interior woodwork, and interior wall work. These were in turn broken down into two major task categories: preparation work and finish work. Of these two, finish work requires the most skill to perform. Each of the operating areas were discussed at length concerning the specific tasks involved in preparatory and finish work.

The individualistic nature of not only painters, but all building workers was also stressed in the chapter. The lack of structure and supervision under which most painters work was given as a possible explanation. The work routine of "Ed" was described in order to more fully show this lack of structure and supervision. It was also intended to give the reader a "feeling" of the company and of an average work day of one of its members.

The demands on the individual of painting were discussed in terms of "work position" and divided into three areas: (1) the technical operations involved; (2) the physical location and environment of the worker; and (3) the social demands which must be fulfilled by anyone

who is to perform adequately in a specific work position. The importance of cooperation was brought out and discussed in relation to the tendency for painters to be individualistic in nature.

Finally, the major technological developments which occurred during the investigator's twelve years with the company were discussed. Also mentioned was the fact that the amount of opposition to change usually depended upon the scope of the innovation.

Chapter Five was constructed to illustrate the formal operations of the organization. It stressed the informality of the company and the shortness of the line of authority. Ultimate authority rested with the owner and in most cases instructions to the employees came directly from him. A source of authority between the owner and the workers existed only "unofficially" in the form of the bosses' son.

In order for an organization to survive, workers who leave must be replaced. In relation to this, the recruitment practices of the company were discussed. These practices were described along with the three major types of workers recruited; i.e., student trainees, experienced workers, and itinerants.

Evaluation of worker merit was discussed in terms of skill, speed, and seniority. The importance placed upon each of these tended to vary from worker to worker.

Consequently, the monetary rewards received by individual painters tended to create friction from time to time among the men. This was especially true whenever a new man was hired at a relatively high pay level.

Chapter Six dealt with the informal operations of the work group. The importance of informal or unofficial organizational behavior and its influence on the functioning of the formal organization was stressed. One aspect of this topic is the informal division of labor. It was stated that workers in this company usually were assembled into "team groups". Specific task assignments were ordinarily left up to and decided by the team members.

Informal groupings and relationships which develop within work organizations was handled in a separate section on cliques. The pair and triad group types were discussed and it was stated that both existed infrequently in this particular organization. The reason for the investigator's preference for the term "friendship clique" was explained and the fact that only one such group existed was discussed. The home guard was described as the final example of informal grouping found in this company. The group was by necessity small and support of the group was a relative matter depending upon who or what was threatening the status quo.

A special section of Chapter Six was devoted to the itinerant painter and the opposition to the itinerant

generally exhibited by the home guard. A painter was classified as an itinerant based on three criteria: (1) Individualistic nature. (2) High absentee rate. (3) Drinks, but not necessarily excessively.

Informal production control was also discussed in this chapter. Painters tend to work in many different team group situations. One's work pace must usually be adjusted to correspond to that of the team of which he is a part. The ability for the painters to either speed up or slow down production was stressed. The tendency for workers to engage in informal practices; such as simple conversation, joking, and general horseplay while on the job was discussed. Finally, informal communication was handled under the headings of the grapevine and argot.

Chapter Seven concerned itself with the painter's work and his self-conception. One's ego-involvement in the task he is performing is often affected by the physical environment. Poor lighting appears to be the most important factor. Fatigue and the degree of skill required to perform a task also has an affect on the painter's ego-involvement in the tasks performed. The painter's ego-involvement in the occupation was discussed in relation to acquired skill, seniority, aspiration level, and the cohesiveness of the work group.

"Dirty work" was discussed in terms of how menial, demeaning or boring the task might be. The investigator expressed the opinion however, that dirty work is a relative matter. That workers in the same occupation may view a certain task differently.

In the section on personality selection, the belief that an occupation tends to be selected by people having certain common personality characteristics was discussed. The belief that an occupation can affect and modify a worker's personality was also expressed.

Mistakes before peers was discussed in terms of the severity of the mistake committed and the affect it has on one's ranking in the eyes of his fellow workers. The following section dealt with how painters protect themselves from both formal and informal criticism after making a mistake on the job.

Chapter Eight was concerned with the relationships as they existed between superiors, subordinates, and peers in this particular work group. It was stated that the painting contractor had an almost "paternalistic" relationship with his painters. Although the regular workers would rarely initiate informal socializing with the boss, they would not hesitate discussing matters such as working conditions and pay with him. Part-time workers exhibited

behavior exactly opposite this. Peer relationships seemed to be based on three factors: age, drinking, and interest in sports.

Chapter Nine dealt with the public image of painting as an occupation. This was discussed from the worker's viewpoint and from the public's viewpoint as seen by the investigator.

In the section concerned with the worker's viewpoint, it was stated that most painters believe that the public has a definite image of painters. Most concede that the public views painters as "heavy drinkers" if not "unreliable drunks". Some painters actively work to dispel this image. As far as the relative rank of the occupation in terms of status, most painters were only concerned with how their trade compared to the other trades in the building industry.

Concerning the public's viewpoint of painters as it is conceived to be by the investigator, it was stated that viewing painters as "unreliable drunks" appears to be dissipating to a certain extent. On the other hand, the investigator believes that the relative status level of the occupation will decline in the future. This is due to the fact that better equipment and material is allowing the average layman to do painting which used to require a skilled craftsman to perform.

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